STAY FREE!

music

advertising

celebrity

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Another season, another issue, and an acedote: A young man interning where I work recently introduced himself as a huge fan of *Stay Free!* We chatted and he elaborated. He is majoring in marketing, has long been fascinated with advertising, and hopes some day to make really cool ads.

Not exactly the hoped-for response. Sure, readers take what they will. No point getting uptight about that or trying to shove something down throats (not that I haven't tried). But it does give one pause. (For the record, *Stay Free!*'s policy on what to major in is as follows: Find out which department at your school has the best teachers—ask around—and then major in that.)

I got a call the other day from Tommy Hilfiger's publicist offering me a chance to go ride in Tommy's plane or ship (it was a vehicle) if I wrote about it. And a man I interviewed who promotes marketing practices I clearly oppose has been eagerly (''aggressively'' would sound libelous) awaiting his appearance in *Stay Free!* so he can use it, along with the *Village Voice* article that mentions him, to promote his consultant agency.

Sometimes I think we're feeding the machine as much as fighting it, which is why I hope *Stay Free!* evolves into something other than an ''anti-commercialism'' magazine; something *for* as-of-yet-undetermind-but-worthwhile alternatives to commercial culture/ consumption. (Joshua Gamson has smart things to say about this, p. 34). Part of my plan includes organizing local stunts and pranks. If you're in New York, reliable, and interested in this sort of thing, feel free to get in touch. It would also be great to have some help with the magazine itself.

Since the last issue, I've started writing about advertising for the *Village Voice*. Four articles here were originally published there.

The back cover this issue breaks house rules against hassling people about what they buy. Forgive us. Sport utility vehicles must be stopped!

Carrie McLaren
Fall/Winter 1998

Stay Free! does our first-ever action with Goldie the Friendly Weasel. Details on p. 9.

STAY FREE!

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Chris Coxwell

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MR. POSTMAN

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I just picked up my first issue of *Stay Free!* (#14), and felt compelled to share a few concerns. My tone can sound didactic at times. Please understand I'm writing out of a good deal of admiration for what you're doing.

When Mr. Ewen asks you whether you consider yourself of the left, this is telling. At first blush, one might say, "Of course you're of the left; the whole magazine consists of counterculture, radical, subversive ideas." Also, you mention your frustration with your parents' afinity for Rush Limbaugh, which of course places you to the left.

There are, however, a good chunk of conservative or morally based writers who arrive at a disgust and thirst-for-change incredibly similar to yours. Figures like Allan Bloom (*The Closing of the American Mind*) and Neil Postman (*Amusing Ourselves to Death*; I'm not so certain of his political angle, though he describes problems in U.S. society with a moral sense these days associated with the right) and Sven Birkerts (*The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*; again, not politically spurred but morally or spiritually inspired) are examples of carefully exacting cultural criticism arriving at a disgust with the corrosive elements of hip, ironic advertising.

The heavy crap quotient in the recent Miller Time and Sprite ads is, to my mind, as much a product of runaway capitalist ambition (to fault of the right, to simplify) as it is a product of the fashionable smugness and in-your-face-decadence-trumps-the-squareness-of-careful-reasoning (which found some of its most fertile ground in the '60s left).

The "anti-conformity" ads of Sprite, which rely on about three levels of irony, tug at our deep-seated need to see ourselves as original, even if it means rebelling again "nonconformists," but also tug at a desire to belong and "step in line" (as ultimately the schmuck who dutifully heeds to what he perceives to be a cool ad does when he picks up a Sprite). Anyhow, please don't assume that the detritus you're uncovering in current culture can only be uncovered from a leftist perspective. After all, this leeds to a complacency and self-satisfaction—indeed, a smugness—which are exactly the traits you have so skillfully attacked.

Leif E. Nilsson
Brookline Village, MA

Right. The left and right often agree on what constitute problems—our focus on materialism, TV overuse, decline of civic values, etc., even while their ideas about the causes and how to approach them differ. Neil Postman has been particularly poignant in showing how left and right values overlap, so at the risk of being didactic, an excerpt (left). —CM

I am what may be called a conservative. This word, of course, is ambiguous, and you may have a different meaning for it from my own. Perhaps it will help us to understand each other if I say that from my point of view, Ronald Reagan is a radical. It is true enough that he continually speaks of the importance of preserving such traditional institutions and beliefs as the family, childhood, the work ethic, self-denial, and religious piety. But in fact President Reagan does not care one way or another whether any of this is preserved. I do not say that he is *against* preserving tradition; I say only that this is not where his interests lie. You cannot have failed to notice that he is mostly concerned to preserve a free-market economy, to encourage the development of what is new, and to keep America technologically progressive. He is what may be called a free-market extremist. All of which is to say he is devoted to capitalism. A capitalist cannot afford the pleasures of conservatism, and of necessity regards tradition as an obstacle to be overcome. How the idea originated that capitalists are conservative is something of a mystery to me. Perhaps it is explained by nothing more sinister than that capitalists are inclined to wear dark suits and matching ties. • In any case, it is fairly easy to document that capitalists have been a force for radical change since the eighteenth century, especially in the U. S. This is a fact that Alexis de Tocqueville noticed when he studied American institutions in the early nineteenth century. "The American lives," he wrote, "in a land of wonders; everything around him is in constant movement, and every movement seems an advance. Consequently, in his mind the idea of newness is closely linked with that of improvement. Nowhere does he see any limit placed by nature to human endeavor; in his eyes something that does not exist is just something that has not been tried." • This is the credo of capitalists the world over, and, I might add, is the source of much of the energy and ingenuity that have characterized American culture for almost 200 years. No people have been more entranced by newness—particularly technological newness—than Americans. • That is why our most important radicals have always been capitalists, especially capitalists who have exploited the possibilities of new technologies. The names that come to mind are Samuel Morse, Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, William Randolph Hearst, Samuel Goldwyn, Henry Luce, Alan Dumont, and Walt Disney, among many others. These capitalist-radicals, inflamed by their fascination for new technologies, created the twentieth century.

—Neil Postman, "The Conservative Outlook," a lecture to conservative business people in Austria. In Conscientious Objections*, 1988.*

Perhaps you'll find this interesting. I started reading *Stay Free!* because of a question I stumbled across while thinking (the source of all my problems) about various "what if" situations. Here's the question: Suppose the corner vender makes the best ham (or tofu, if you're a vegetarian) sandwiches in the world. Everyday on your way to work you stop by and buy one for lunch. Now, you never really talked with the guy, but he seemed nice enough. He was always polite and friendly. Then, one day, through a reliable source, you learn that this same friendly vendor goes home and beats his wife. Do you continue to buy your sandwiches from him?? Granted, you're giving him money for services rendered, but where do morals fit into this equation? Should you stop supporting this creep because of what he does in his personal life? Or should you just accept "business is business" and leave it at that? Is it a person's responsibility as a consumer to do "research" on every product he or she buys? But where does one's personal privacy come into play? I avoid Blockbuster because I don't want to support the Christian Coalition. But the owner of Blockbuster just happens to be a major supporter of the Coalition. Blockbuster isn't advertised as "Christian Coalition Headquarters." In fact, the Coalition has nothing to do with Blockbuster as far as the business aspect is considered (I think). But, knowing that extra information directly affects whether or not I will do business with them. Is ignorance truly bliss? So then I decide to go to a mom and pop video rental place . . . yet the mom and pop video store that I do visit could be turning around and giving all their profits to the Christian Coalition as well. So am I supposed to start asking them what they do with their money? Or should I just give them money for a video rental and let them do whatever they want with their money? Anyway, these are the questions that are keeping me awake at night, and that's why I read your mag! Keep up the good work!

Mike Mueller
Novi, MI

Yikes! Get it off!

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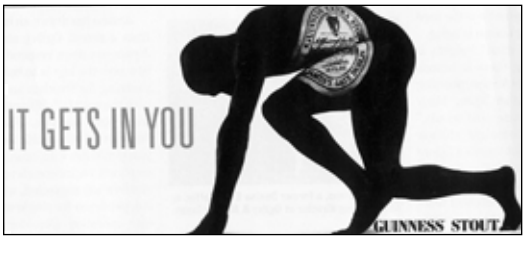


Last night, I was watching TV and a PSA came across the tube. It was a young girl and a local anchorwoman talking about a famous artist who had been inspired by a teacher. Turns out to be Georgia O'Keefe, someone I deeply admire and respect.

I was pleased, to say the least, to see a reflection of my tastes flashing across the screen like that, even if it was only 30 seconds' worth. After the PSA, the words "brought to you by Chevrolet" lit up for five seconds or so. This really pissed me off. How dare they co-opt my favorite artist to sell their fucking cars?

This morning as I drove to work I got to thinking about it again. This shit is going on *everywhere*! On July 4th I went to an Independence Day celebration in York, Penn., to see some fireworks and watch some friends play in the symphony. The first thing I noticed (because I look for things like this) was a huuuge Bon-Ton (department store chain) banner behind where the symphony was going to play. Underneath that was a smaller banner for the York Newspaper Co.

When the proceedings got started they mentioned Bon-Ton five times, and *York News* three. Each company had a representative get up on stage and talk about the great deeds that Bon-Ton is doing, sponsoring the fireworks and symphony, blah blah blah. There was one mention of the fact that it was the nation's birthday (and a smattering of applause in response).

Since there were 1500 Bon-Ton employees occupying the prime seats in the grandstand, a huge round of applause rang out every time a Bon-Ton moment occurred. I felt very alone. If 1,500 people start to clap, the other 5,000 suckers sitting behind them will automatically start clapping, too. Ugh!

It didn't end there. After a horrible, horrible presentation by Up With People! that lasted nearly an hour, the fireworks started. The notable feature of the show was the ground effects display near the end. Lit up in flaming points of light were the words, "Thank You Bon-Ton and *York News*." It was disgusting.

Stadiums get bought out by corporations, which plaster their names everywhere. Sporting events are heavily underwritten by corporations which attach their names to the event. Ray Charles hawks for Hardees. "Life in a Northern Town" was licensed for a hayfever drug. Nothing is sacred any more, and so I was inspired to create this picture. Hope it slightly amuses you.

John Nolt
Harrisburg, PA

All babies may look alike, but just wait until they can talk. Western International Media has published a study called "The Nag Factor" to figure out the different "nagging styles" kids use to pressure their parents to buy. Indulgers (29%) give their kids everything they want. Kids' Pals (15%) want to have fun like their offspring. Conflicted (22%) buy out of guilt and contain a high proportion of single or divorced parents. Bare Necessities (32%) have the highest median household income, yet are the least likely to give into kids' pleas. According to the study, it's the quality—not the quantity—of nagging that counts. "Importance nagging," a form of manipulation where a kid argues a need ("I'll *die* if I can't go on Space Mountain!") increased purchases of food and beverages, CD-ROMs, and visits to theme parks by 42%. (*Brandweek*, 4/13/98)

Super Jockey is a Japanese comedy/game show in which celebrities compete in eating disgusting flavors of ice cream, playing charades, etc. Not terribly unlike *American Gladiators* except for one thing: the show's unique plan for giving sponsors air time. Instead of paying for commercials, sponsors can earn a spot by bringing bikini-clad women on to be dunked in scaldingly hot water. The longer the women can stay in the water, the longer she is allowed to deliver a commercial. Most women last three or four seconds in the heat, after which they rub ice over themselves or jump up and down in pain as the camera focuses on their reddened breasts and legs. Once they have cooled off, they can advertise whatever product they want for exactly the among of time they were able to stay in the water. (*New York Times*, 7/14/98)

A decade ago, about a quarter of the nation's nursery schools had computers. Now, nearly all do. Child-care giant KinderCare Learning Centers Inc. uses computers for three- and four-year-olds at all of its facilities. Computertots offers computer training for two year olds via 238 franchises around the world. Knowledge Adventures plans to unveil JumpStart Baby in summer 1998. The product is called "lapwear"—meaning an infant may have to sit on a parents lap while playing—and it is geared to those between ages nine months and two years. (*WSJ*, 4/2/98)

Moms-to-Be Resource Center in Atlanta is but one of several clinics reaching out to teenagers with fun and games. Visitors can play Fetus Bingo (U is for uterus, F is for fetal-alcohol syndrome, S is for Sex . . . FETUS!); watch the "Magical Moments of Birth" video; or coddle fake, finger-sucking fetuses (three sizes available: 10 weeks, 15 week, 20 weeks). For each activity, participants rack up points: 5 for reading a "Teen Esteem" pamphlet, 35 for watching "Smokey Sue Smokes" inhale. Points can be redeemed for Avon products, Winnie-the-Pooh outfits, or other gifts. (*WSJ*, 1/26/98)

The following memo was sent to magazines that Coca-Cola advertises in. It's from Coke's ad agency, McCann-Erickson, and stipulates where Coke ads may be placed in the mag:

The Coca-Cola Company requires that all insertions are placed adjacent to editorial that is consistent with each brand's marketing strategy/positioning. In general, we believe that positive and upbeat editorial provides a compatible environment in which to communicate the brand's message. We consider the following subjects to be inappropriate and require that our ads placed adjacent to articles discussing the following issues:

- *Hard News*
- *Sex related issues*
- *Drugs (Prescription or illegal)*
- *Medicine (chronic illnesses such as cancer, diabetes, AIDS, etc.)*
- *Health (mental or physical medical conditions)*
- *Negative Diet Information (bulimia, anorexia, quick weight loss, etc.)*
- *Food*
- *Political issues*
- *Environmental issues*
- *Articles containing vulgar language*
- *Religion*

If you have a positioning question or if an ad needs to be moved due

WORLD VIEW

to inappropriate editorial, you must contact the AOR immediately and provide positioning options. If an appropriate positioning option is not available, we reserve the right to omit our ad from that issue. The Coca-Cola Company also requires a minimum of 6 pages separation between competitive advertising (any non-alcoholic beverage, including water, juice, coffee, milk). If there is more than one Coca-Cola brand running in an issue of your magazine, we require 6 pages of separation.

TV news broadcasters in California had a rude awakening when KTLA broadcast a debate between candidates for governor and had their usual morning ratings double. KTLA news director Jeff Wald explained, "We had been caught up in other things and hadn't realized that this is a very interesting race." According to Wald it was "because of the May Sweeps." Wald said the sweeps "discourage political coverage in the month before the primary at all stations." (*Washington Post*, 5/23/98, via *Newspeak*)

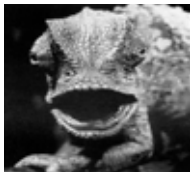
To discourage overzealous collectors, Target employees in the Southwest have punched holes in the packaging of commemorative NASCAR race-car replicas. In the race to acquire these limited-edition cars, collectors have been paying children to locate them. Some of the kids have been lining up before stores open to get first crack at the shelves. Fistfights reportedly have broken out at some places, with kids getting knocked down in scuffles between adults. It's the same sort of mania that has been driving the Beanie Babies market, and the Kenner action-figures market before that. (*San Francisco Examiner*, 6/13/98)

What do Shaquille O'Neal, Jamie Lee Curtis, Michael Bolton, Dom DeLuise, Mary Chapin-Carpenter, Kirk Douglas, John Travolta, Sarah Ferguson, Carly Simon, and Patrick Ewing have in common? They've all recently authored children's books. From Mr. Bolton's *The Secret of the Lost Kingdom*:

The prince told him of the mysterious warrior, who was so like himself, and of the many others who fought courageously for what they felt was rightfully theirs. "Father, I've always believed that when I fight for Mentor-ia, I fight for what is right and just. But if we are going to slaughter poorly armed men, then I must leave."

According to a Scholastic spokesman for Patrick Ewing, "He's definitely involved" in his series *Patrick's Pals*, explaining, "He *does* write." (*WSJ*, 5/4/98)

When it opens next year, the new Novergies Centre garbage plant will have an artist-in-residence, an exhibition hall, a teak sun deck, a view of the cathedral, even catering facilities for receptions. Unlike the U.S., which enjoys enough space to dump most of its garbage in landfill sites, Europe burns a lot of its waste. No one wants an industrial eyesore in their backyard, so town planners and municipalities are turning to architects and artists. "A community won't accept a site unless it's beautiful. It has to look like a ship or a wave," saysHerve Guichaoua, a project director for Foster Wheeler Corp. (*WSJ*, 6/10/98)



SUBSCRIBE TO STAY FREE!

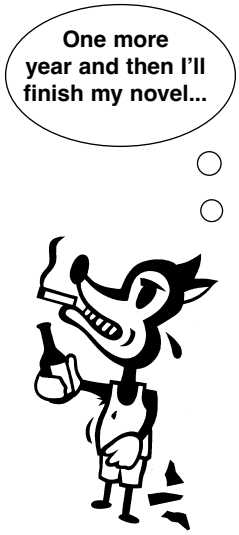
As a nonprofit, totally independent magazine, *Stay Free!* depends on your support. **PLEASE SUBSCRIBE. 3 issues are $10 from P.O. Box 306 Prince Street Station, New York, NY 10012.** (Canada & Mexico: $11; C. & S. America, Europe: $15; Elsewhere: $17)

STAY FREE! ACTION

As we go to press, Goldie the Friendly Weasel has been greeting people across New York City. Goldie is the decidedly *un*official mascot of the Golden Marble Awards, the Golden Marbles being the ad industry's new prize for advertising that targets kids. Sponsors of the Golden Marble include Nickelodeon, Fox Kids, the Cartoon Network, and several multi-national ad agencies.

To help promote the Golden Marbles, *Stay Free!* created a comic book,*Goldie the Friendly Weasel,* and handed copies out to the public around FAO Schwarz toy store, Nike Town, and the Disney Store the day before the Golden Marbles ceremony. If I didn't have to send the zine to the printer in three hours, I'd write more about this amazing, surreal experience. I'm convinced that everyone should spend at least one day of their life hanging out with a nasty, 5-foot tall, tie-wearing weasel (at any rate, people are about ten times more likely to take your literature if you've got such a creature in tow). We quickly lost track of requests for Goldie photos and terrified, crying toddlers. Mission accomplished!

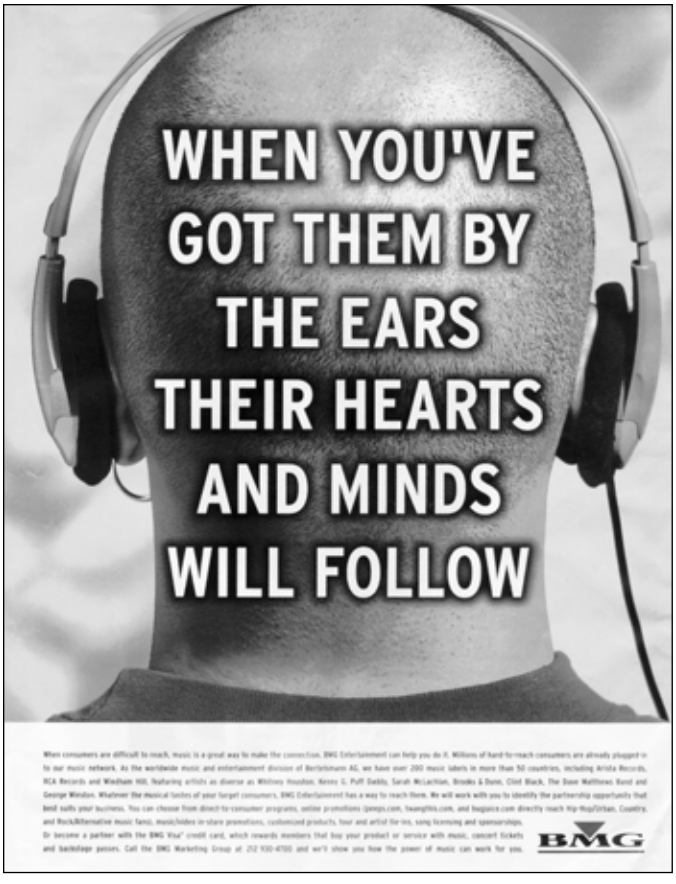
Special copies of *Stay Free!* #15 include a copy of *Goldie*. If you would like one, send $1 to *Stay Free!*, P.O. Box 306, Prince St. Station, NYC 10012.



Goldie co-conspirators: Tim Ries, Dale Flattum (who did the illustrations), Alexandra Ringe (the weasel), David Glenn, John Aboud, Matt Ransford, David Gochfeld, Andrew Hearst, Elisabeth Vincentelli, T.L. Popejoy, and Carrie McLaren. Photos by Carrie.

Licensed to Sell

on music in commercials



A trade ad for BMG, 1998.

Pretty much the only pitchy chorus you'll hear from commercials these days is this one: the jingle is dead. Once a standby of TV and radio commercials, those maddeningly catchy maxims are no longer. Plop, plop, fizz, fizz? Been there, done that. Ads now aspire to loftier heights: making the music in commercials as entertaining as the stuff on CDs. Just as advertisers have employed hep film directors (John Woo, the Coen brothers, Kevin Smith) to transform commercials visually, they're enlisting esteemed artists to liven up the audio.

Pop music and advertising have a long history together. But whereas a couple of decades ago jingles would occasionally work as pop music and vice versa (Coke's "I'd Like To Teach the World To Sing" broke the Top 10 in 1972; the Carpenters' "We've Only Just Begun" was originally a bank commercial), by the '80s, crossing over had, uh, crossed over.

Advertisers increasingly turned to licensing popular songs, rather than crafting original tunes for commercials. Once Nike bought the rights to the Beatles' "Revolution," everything seemed up for grabs. Parliament, Staple Singers, "Disco Inferno": if it can be hummed—and even if it can't—it can be licensed.

"Audiences today are too intelligent and sophisticated for [jingles]," says Rick Lyon of Lyon Music, a company that makes ad music. People easily

Licensed to Sell (cont.)

identify jingles as advertising and tune them out. Music in ads these days shouldn't dare sing the praises of the product, or even mention it.

But is "intelligent" the right word? Rationality wasn't behind the kick in the head I felt when, upon entering a local bagel place, I heard "Everyday People" on a radio and . . . thought of a car commercial. Not Sly Stone. Or discovering those records in college. Or even the predictability of hit radio. A FUCKING car commercial.

Consciousness, in other words, has little to do with it. People react intuitively, and commercials turn that to an advantage. Jingles aimed to elicit brand-name recall, but ads now work by "borrowing interest"—transferring value from the music to the product. Commercials not only borrow interest from music, they borrow our interests, milking our memories and desires, and selling them back to us. And since licensed songs are of the culture, they work as a shorthand for consumer lifestyles, from rock-and-roll rebellion to sophisticated jazz cool to obscure, weirdo noise.

Small wonder then that advertisers prefer licensed songs to original ones. They not only get "proven" hits, they get more to borrow: the image of the artist, the video, the movie—all synergized to copromote.

This upside can be a downside as well. The more well known a song or artist, the more convoluted the association, the more difficult to make a connection between the song and the brand stick. As Lyon points out, the *Dragnet* theme—once an ad for a TV show—is now in an MCI campaign. Last year it was in a Nissan campaign. And for a decade it's been licensed for "Tum-ta-tum-tums."

And then there's the possible fallout from appropriating the wrong song. Children of the '60s may feel politically wronged when the messages behind their "Revolution"s and Janis Joplins are co-opted. Or morally wronged: how could so-and-so sell out? But when I reacted to "Everyday People," it wasn't about selling out or some '60s multiculti love-in; it was as if the song in my head had been swiped.

Lyon acknowledges these concerns and admits to cringing when the Four Tops leader sings about Velveeta. "But why the double standard?" he asks. "Why is it just fine to parody a transcendent artwork like the Mona Lisa in scores of ads, but wrong to license 'Start Me Up?'"

For better or worse, "Start Me Up" punches more buttons; it's more culturally relevant. Whereas Mona Lisa is ancient high art (and now kitsch), the Stones song is contemporary and popular—it speaks to more people. And whereas only a hopelessly naive idealist would deign to protect all of Art from taint of commerce, we muster up the energy to scream when our personal experience is at stake. (They can take "Revolution" and William Burroughs and KRS-1 and the Verve, but Sly Stone? That's it. Next thing you know they'll be coming for my right arm.)

Unfortunately, we may not realize the loss until after the fact. The worst thing about hearing "Everyday People" in that car commercial was that it didn't bother me initially. Maybe I even enjoyed it. The same thing that disarms commercials' power—disengagement—ultimately lulls us back in. Acceptance, ironically, is the bummer side effect of cynicism.

"But, really, what is the difference between using Candice Bergen's Murphy Brown character in a commercial and Sly Stone's 'Everyday People'?" asks Lyon. "There is really no difference because Murphy Brown and 'Everyday People' are commodities with instant audience recognition."

Sure, like every song on commercial radio, "Everyday People" is there to sell something. The reason Murphy Brown plugging Sprint doesn't bother us is because we've never convinced ourselves she's there for any other reason. But considering that every last human desire, experience, and action gets commodified in one way or another, abandoning all commodities means throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The intersections between art and entertainment and commerce are loaded with fine lines and gray areas, but that hardly makes trying to distinguish them unnecessary. At any rate, there is a difference between simply selling music and using music to sell jeans.

When a song becomes too commodified, too overdetermined, what happens to the *music*? (And I'm not talking about some transcendental, life-affirming expression; just something to be listened to, period.) Songs are now plucked for commercials as soon as they break the charts; it's as if that's the whole point in the first place. The avant-garde of the moment, techno, made its way into commercials even before breaking the Top 10—a phenomenon unheard of in the past. And Sherman Oaks, California, is now home to Ultra Lounge, reported to be the first ever "retail environment" based on a CD compilation series based on a lifestyle movement based on a past decade.

A song makes its way into popular consciousness now equipped with an army of strategically linked agendas. A single tune may evoke images of genre, of the artist, of the video, of the decade or era, of the generation, the store where purchased, lifestyle magazines, clothing line, video channels and media

Licensed to Sell (cont.)

outlets, even its "degree of uncommercialness."

With so many brands competing for the same images, marketers like Lyon have hit upon a postlicensing strategy: to get the instant values communicated through a pop song but in a way unique to the commercial. A recent Gap campaign gives LL Cool J, Luscious Jackson, and other musicians 30 seconds to create "whatever they want," rather than performing known songs; Nike and Calvin Klein play A&R director, seeking out experimental ensembles such as Faust, Tortoise, and Flying Saucer Attack for the very traits that make them "uncommercial." When something as "out there" as Faust—unsalable in its own right—can be lucratively converted to a means to sell, everything really is up for grabs. We can no longer assume that any music, no matter how obscure, exists for its own sake.

As business primes every mainstream and alternative to the alternative to the alternative, and as the lead time between appearing in record stores and commercials shrinks, music fans face a double bind: The one easy defense against all this crap—cynicism, emotional detachment—gets in the way of experiencing music in the first place. And cynicism is a slippery slope. To be cynical and detached enough, you'd need a hole drilled in your head.

So what now? I'm not sure, but until we figure something out, I'd like to suggest a moratorium on further uses of Parliament, Stereolab, and Hank Williams in commercials, in exchange for forfeiting the rights to all electronica. (Tricky, Spooky, Chemical Brothers: all yours!) Or maybe we should, as a friend of mine suggested, just start recording the fax machine and listening to that. With so many forces competing for our ears, we're only going to find music where it is least expected. —*Carrie McLaren*

After the previous article was published in the* Voice*, I received the following email. Actually, the first one is reponding to both the* Voice *piece and a Q/A interview with Rick Lyon, which I did for the Matador Records newsletter and website (my day job). The relevant part follows:

LYON: I think it's a stretch to support someone's right as an artist to score, say, a John Woo film, with blood and gore all over the place, but question my plying the same wares in a thirty-second spot for the phone company. Look at those great Gap spots that gave Aerosmith and LL Cool J thirty seconds with which to do whatever they wanted. Is that selling out? What about appearing in a Kool cigarettes concert series? What's the difference between their writing a jingle and doing an interview with Kurt Loder? Is it selling out to do an *Unplugged*? Where do you draw the line?
MCLAREN: I'm not really sure where to draw the line, although it certainly wouldn't be between soundtracks and commercials, which are pretty much the same thing. One question I keep coming back to is whether music is an end in itself or a means to some other end, like selling a product. Why was this music created, and what does it express and mean?
LYON: Look, whether it's in on the radio or a thirty-second spot, music is a powerful aesthetic tool, and it has a potent effect on the emotions.
MCLAREN: Sure, but if you're talking about music as a powerful emotional tool, you get Muzak, proven to make you chew faster in a restaurant, but that ain't art.
LYON: No, it's more like hypnosis, but that's not the business I'm in.

—from "Why Popular Music Really Does Suck," in the "lost" issue of *Escandalo!*, the Matador Records newsletter

Carrie,
I have to agree with the commercials composer that the line you are trying to draw is false. Sonic Youth may be on MTV and sell halfway to gold, but they seem more artisti-

cally pure to me than mediocre Matador bands. Which is not saying much for either.

If there were a more democratic delivery system (as the early days of FM are always portrayed) instead of a hype system designed to produce and milk blockbusters, then the available music would be more varied and higher quality. And people would be happier.

So where's the only public medium you might hear the Stooges or Ramones in the last few years? Nike and Budweiser commercials. Where would a noncollege-radio geek hear FSA or Faust? Or rap and techno before their crossovers? The makers of commercials, benighted as they may be, only care about what will work in their commercial, not about the music and its marketing. So they'll throw shit at the wall and see what sticks.

Music on the radio or on MTV is already, like TV and movies, meant to sell something, to keep our attention for the actual advertising. That doesn't mean it's inherently worthless, but it's no less "sold" than the same song in a jingle. Playing a record for yourself creates a different listening environment which completely changes the meaning of the music. If anywhere, that's where to draw the line, at the active agency of the audience. Likewise, going to a show.

Now for me, "Search and Destroy" ripped every time that Nike commercial was on, and I'd much rather hear that than some fake rock composed just for the commercial. And I think it's good that the real shit has some way of making it to the ears of the public beyond the hushed whispers of the scenester. Likewise FSA and Faust (though I haven't heard those commercials). Every time something good gets a public outlet, it's a hammer against all the weak worthless shit that gets shoved down our throats. —Eric

Eric,
I agree with your line, and say as much in the article. The point is that hearing music in a commercial interferes with my "active agency," to use your term. When I pull out a Gil Scott-Heron record, I think of KRS-1's horrible commercial; to listen to Peggy Lee or Julie London, it's the cocktail nation. A song played on the radio is no less "sold" than one in a commercial, true, but commercials are generally more strongly branded than radio stations. They're harder to exorcise, disassociate from the song.

You like to hear your favorite songs in a commercial. Great. It makes me cringe. It affects what I get out of listening. Why is that wrong? You might as well say I'm wrong for hating techno and loving honky-tonk.

It'd be a great thing if more people appreciated good music/art. But "better" sounds showing up "weak/lameass" sounds doesn't mean anything to me. Music isn't just the particular sounds, it's not technical skill or ability; it's what those things communicate and express. It's the context from which it's experienced. However "great" a song may sound, it's going to be heard differently when used in a commercial, tied in with a 2-for-1 disposable razor contest, and placed in little baggies alongside shampoo samples delivered to your doorstep.

best,
Carrie

P.S. If Matador is so mediocre, why read the website?

Enjoyed your piece in the *Voice*. For me, the first time this phenomena hurt was after *The Big Chill* became so overwhelming that I stopped listening to Motown for years. And it is amongst my favorite music. I just can't stand the image of Glenn Close swinging her hips and Kevin Klein snapping his fingers everytime I hear the Temps. And those dinner parties that suddenly required Motown as clean-up music . . . sick!

David Poland

Ms. McLaren,
The jingle isn't dead, yet. In fact we're playing them several times a month at various clubs around New York. I don't mean recordings of commercials but our own versions of those unconscious mental soundtracks from a flesh and blood band of six TV junkies called the AdverTeasers (www.pacmult.com/adverteasers). That's all we play, commercials. Strangely enough there is an audience out there for these "lost" classics.

Ironically and fortunately we have a career (and I use that term loosely) due to the fact that jingles *are* relatively unavailable to the general public these days as a result of the infiltration of pop music. Despite the licensing trend, some of these one-minute masterpieces are beginning to pop back up again—Almond Joy and Mounds, Slinky (used in a car commercial). I suspect that we, the AdverTeasers, are riding some sort of baby boomer wave of nostalgia. Just call us rank opportunists. Oh yeah, one more thing: You already like us.

Signed,
The Keyboard Guy

excerpt.

The artist's business is—unlike a craftsman's—not to produce an emotional effect in an audience, but, for example, to make a tune. This tune is already complete and perfect when it exists merely as a tune in this head, that is, an imaginary tune. Next, he may arrange for the tune to be played before an audience. Now there comes into existence a real tune, a collection of noises. But which of these two things is the work of art? Which of them is music? The music, the work of art, is not the collection of noises, it is the tune in the composer's head. The noises made by the performers, and heard by the audience, are not the music at all; they are only means by which the audience, if they listen intelligently (not otherwise), can reconstruct for themselves the imaginary tune that existed in the composer's head.

This is not a paradox. We all know perfectly well that a person who hears the noises instruments make is not thereby possessing himself of the music. Perhaps no one can do that unless he does hear the noises, but there is something else which he must do as well. Our ordinary word for this other thing is listening; and the listening which we have to do when we hear the noises made by musicians is in a way rather like the thinking we have to do when we hear the noises made, for example, by a person lecturing on a scientific subject. We hear the sound of his voice; but what he is doing is not simply making noises, but developing a scientific thesis. The noises are meant to assist us in achieving what he assumes to be our purpose in coming to hear him lecture, that is, thinking this same scientific thesis for ourselves. The lecture, therefore, is not a collection of noises made by the lecturer with his organs of speech; it is a collection of scientific thoughts related to those noises in such a way that a person who not only hears but thinks as well becomes able to think these thoughts by means of speech, if we like; but if we do, we must think of communication not as an "imparting" of thought by the speaker to the hearer, the speaker somehow planting his thought in the hearer's receptive mind, but as a "reproduction" of the speaker's thought by the hearer, in virtue of his own active thinking.

The parallel with listening to music is not complete. The cases are dissimilar in that a concert and a lecture are different things, and what we are trying to get out of a concert is a thing of a different kind from thoughts we are trying to get out of a lecture. But they are similar in this: Just as what we get out of the lecture is something other than the noises we hear proceeding from the lecturer's mouth, so what we get out of the concert is something other than the noises made by performers. . . .

Everybody must have noticed a certain discrepancy between what we actually see when listening to music or speech and what we imaginatively hear. In watching a puppet-play we could swear that we have seen the expression on the puppets' faces change with their changing gestures and the puppet-man's words. Knowing that they are puppets, we know that their facial expression cannot change; but that makes no difference; we continue to see imaginatively the expressions which we know that we do not see actually. . . . When we are listening to a speaker or singer, imagination is constantly supplying articulate sounds which our ears do not actually catch.

From *The Principles of Art*, by R. G. Collingwood, Clarendon Press, 1938

salesnoise
a timeline of music & advertising

Pretty much as soon as there was such a thing as a music industry (and such a thing as an advertising industry), music was employed to sell. The music and advertising industries took shape in the late 1800s and cemented their relationship with commercial radio broadcasting in the '20s. Accompanied by groups such as the Lucky Strike Orchestra and the Vick's Vap-o-rub Quartet, radio blurred distinctions between advertising and what we now call "content" from the start.

Working on that *VOICE* piece got me wondering: Why did I ever think the distinction between ads and pop music was a natural one in the first place? Why did I assume that the relationship between them had continually gotten blurrier, when it actually started blurry, separated (but still dated occasionally), and got blurrier again? What, exactly, are the differences between then and now? None of these questions could be broached in 1,400 or so words. Thus, the timeline.

"If it's always been like this, what's the big deal?"

Well, it *hasn't* always been like this. To see familiar roots hardly means that music's relationship to advertising hasn't radically changed. For instance, the reason sponsors blurred advertising and programming early on was due to fear of offending listeners and inciting government regulation. A direct pitch over the airwaves was presumed taboo. In contrast, advertising and pop music snuggled post-'50s not because the mere fact of advertising reflected poorly on a company. People had more or less come to accept advertising as a fact of life by then. But people—constantly bombarded with advertisements—tuned them out. Advertisers were increasingly competing against each other, rather than some notion of propriety. In fact, blurring itself became socially unacceptable. Blurring was identified as co-opting. This was articulated through rock, which, back in the day, defined itself as an attitude more than anything else—an attitude against institutions, against commercialism. And that idea, if not the reality, has been, for those of us born in the last twenty or thirty years, the water in which we swim.

Early advertising music also had different aims. Music then was primarily used as a mnemonic device. Rhyme and repetition were enlisted to kept a brand name in mind. "Singing commercials" or jingles made up a self-contained genre. Music now is more often employed as "borrowed interest," capturing a feeling, setting a mood, recalling past experiences and playing them back on behalf of the sponsors.

Mass media may have integrated music and advertising from the start, but media played a much smaller role in how people experienced music. Music was played, sung, and created in the home and at local events. Popular music now is practically inseparable from media. With Walkmans, hi-fis, and car radio, music is both portable and ubiquitous, not something that requires seeking out. And with TV and, later, MTV, popular music includes visuals. We're seeing the movie before reading the book.

We could do a similar timeline for comedy, sports, film, even books. But something about music—so immediate, and intangible and spiritual and abstract—makes its case particularly telling. Music, more than these other parts of culture, is its own language.

We originally intended this to be a couple of pages but got a little carried away. Twelve pages later, it nearly scratches the surface. When did record companies form "special products" departments to market music to nonmusic fans? What's the history of music as a premium? Of music to sell fashion? Well, dunno. Maybe in the future we'll expand the info here and publish a one-off—or at least update the web version. So anyone with insight is encouraged to get in touch.

One more thing: as those of us who work in the music industry well know, pop music has seen better days. The kids aren't listening or buying; rockers can make a lot more money licensing songs for commercials and soundtracks than selling records. At the risk of overgeneralizing and boiling down very complicated issues into a pat conclusion, I don't think this is a coincidence. —*CM*

Timeline by Carrie McLaren & Rick Prelinger

1880–1920

Entertainment and salesmanship collide: department stores hire circus clowns and acrobats; movie theaters project slides advertising local businesses; vaudeville theater curtains carry painted ads; utility companies sponsor cooking demonstrations with a cast of orchestra, singers and skit players; trolley companies invest in and promote amusement parks; companies sponsor sporting events, barn dances and college proms. Later, Esso Gasoline sponsors Guy Lombardo's orchestra, with a gas sales receipt required for admission.

1891

Throughout the nineteenth century, advertisers tended to break out into rhyme when writing copy, partly in jest and partly because rhymes made brand names easier to remember. In 1891 the De Long Hook and Eye Co., commissions a series of "jingles" (known then as rhymed verses) and the phrase "See that Hump" becomes a part of everyday language.

He rose, she took the seat and said,
"I thank you," and the man fell dead.
But ere he turned a lifeless lump.
He murmered: "See that Hump."

Thus is born a jingle craze, which peaks around 1900–1903. Memorizing jingles becomes a fad. One campaign chronicles the travails of old man Jim Dumps, who was rehabilitated into "Sunny Jim" when treated to Force cereal. Over 5,000 unsolicited jingles are mailed in from readers, many unprintable. Another jingle hero: Phoebe Snow becomes a national pin-up girl and a household word in a series describing her sanitary railroad trips.

1908

The song "In My Merry Oldsmobile" by Johnny Marks becomes a popular anthem of the emerging car culture. Recognizing its sales potential, the Oldsmobile Motor Company uses the song in its advertising and promotion.

1914

ASCAP is founded to issue licenses and collect royalties

1915

Amateur radio operator Arthur B. Church advertises radio parts—the first use of radio for advertising.

1916

Variety organizes an effort to curb payola, then known as paying sheet music performers to plug songs. Money that was formerly used to advertise songs in trade magazines (such as *Variety*) was increasingly spent on song pluggers.

1920

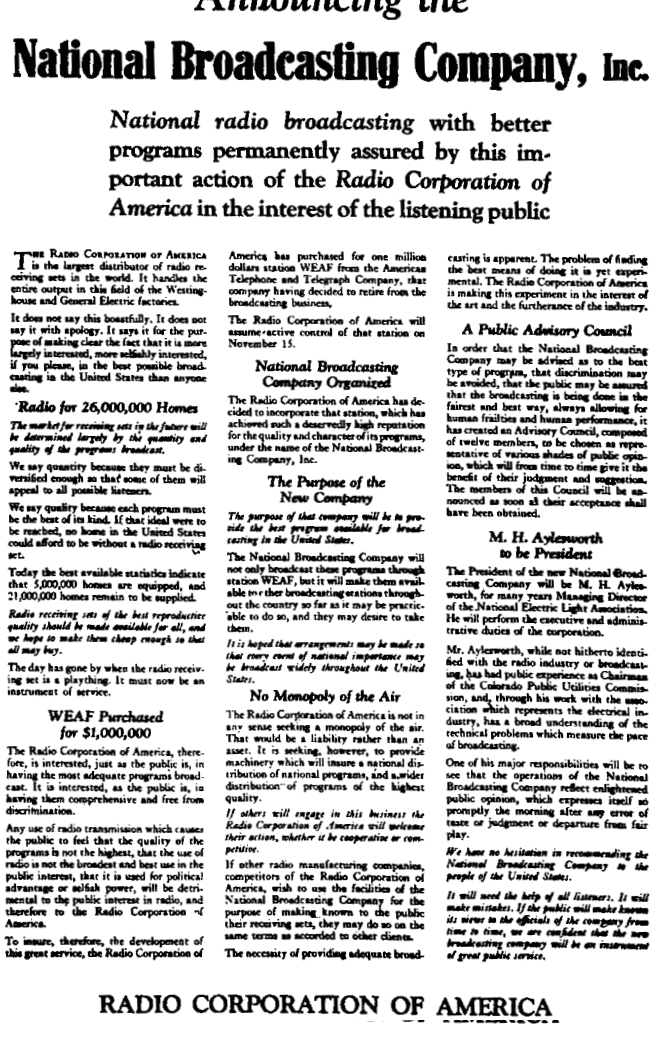
Frank Conrad, a Westinghouse employee, airs recorded music from a transmitter in his Pittsburgh garage. His employer notices that these broadcasts increase radio equipment sales, moves Conrad's transmitter to its factory roof, applies for a government license, and starts pioneer station KDKA.

Early 1920s

"[It would be] inconceivable that we should allow so great a possibility for service to be drowned in advertiser chatter."
— Herbert Hoover

Debate rages over how to make money off radio. Some support a European-style tax on radio owners, others suggest that stations scramble their programs and sell decoders, like today's cable TV operators. Many solicit philanthropic contributions and listener support, but these are unsuccessful. Over half the stations established between 1922 and 1925 close, mostly due to financial problems.

Meanwhile, the main financial motive for making programs is selling receivers. Stations don't concern themselves with creating an audience for advertising. And advertisers don't set out to capture radio, either. In fact, the overwhelming majority of advertisers view radio as culturally uplifting, a veritable public service. The wealthier classes are the first to own



Announcing the

National Broadcasting Company, Inc.

National radio broadcasting **with better programs permanently assured by this important action of the *Radio Corporation of America* in the interest of the listening public**

THE RADIO CORPORATION OF AMERICA is the largest distributor of radio receiving sets in the world. It handles the entire output in this field of the Westinghouse and General Electric factories.

It does not say this boastfully. It does not say it with apology. It says it for the purpose of making clear the fact that it is more largely interested, more selfishly interested, if you please, in the best possible broadcasting in the United States than anyone else.

Radio for 26,000,000 Homes

The market for receiving sets in the future will be determined largely by the quantity and quality of the programs broadcast.

We say quantity because they must be diversified enough so that some of them will appeal to all possible listeners.

We say quality because each program must be the best of its kind. If that ideal were to be reached, no home in the United States could afford to be without a radio receiving set.

Today the best available statistics indicate that 5,000,000 homes are equipped, and 21,000,000 homes remain to be supplied.

Radio receiving sets of the best reproductive quality should be made available for all, and we hope to make them cheap enough so that all may buy.

The day has gone by when the radio receiving set is a plaything. It must now be an instrument of service.

WEAF Purchased for $1,000,000

The Radio Corporation of America, therefore, is interested, just as the public is, in having the most adequate programs broadcast. It is interested, as the public is, in having them comprehensive and free from discrimination.

Any use of radio transmission which causes the public to feel that the quality of the programs is not the highest, that the use of radio is not the broadest and best use in the public interest, that it is used for political advantage or selfish power, will be detrimental to the public interest in radio, and therefore to the Radio Corporation of America.

To insure, therefore, the development of this great service, the Radio Corporation of America has purchased for one million dollars station WEAF from the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, that company having decided to retire from the broadcasting business.

The Radio Corporation of America will assume active control of that station on November 15.

National Broadcasting Company Organized

The Radio Corporation of America has decided to incorporate that station, which has achieved such a deservedly high reputation for the quality and character of its programs, under the name of the National Broadcasting Company, Inc.

The Purpose of the New Company

The purpose of that company will be to provide the best program available for broadcasting in the United States.

The National Broadcasting Company will not only broadcast these programs through station WEAF, but it will make them available over broadcasting stations throughout the country so far as it may be practicable to do so, and they may desire to take them.

It is hoped that arrangements may be made so that every event of national importance may be broadcast widely throughout the United States.

No Monopoly of the Air

The Radio Corporation of America is not in any sense seeking a monopoly of the air. That would be a liability rather than an asset. It is seeking, however, to provide machinery which will insure a national distribution of national programs, and a wider distribution of programs of the highest quality.

If others will engage in this business the Radio Corporation of America will welcome their action, whether it be cooperative or competitive.

If other radio manufacturing companies, competitors of the Radio Corporation of America, wish to use the facilities of the National Broadcasting Company for the purpose of making known to the public their receiving sets, they may do so on the same terms as accorded to other clients.

The necessity of providing adequate broadcasting is apparent. The problem of finding the best means of doing it is yet experimental. The Radio Corporation of America is making this experiment in the interest of the art and the furtherance of the industry.

A Public Advisory Council

In order that the National Broadcasting Company may be advised as to the best type of program, that discrimination may be avoided, that the public may be assured that the broadcasting is being done in the fairest and best way, always allowing for human frailties and human performance, it has created an Advisory Council, composed of twelve members, to be chosen as representative of various shades of public opinion, which will from time to time give it the benefit of their judgment and suggestion. The members of this Council will be announced as soon as their acceptance shall have been obtained.

M. H. Aylesworth to be President

The President of the new National Broadcasting Company will be M. H. Aylesworth, for many years Managing Director of the National Electric Light Association. He will perform the executive and administrative duties of the corporation.

Mr. Aylesworth, while not hitherto identified with the radio industry or broadcasting, has had public experience as Chairman of the Colorado Public Utilities Commission, and, through his work with the association which represents the electrical industry, has a broad understanding of the technical problems which measure the pace of broadcasting.

One of his major responsibilities will be to see that the operations of the National Broadcasting Company reflect enlightened public opinion, which expresses itself so promptly the morning after any error of taste or judgment or departure from fair play.

We have no hesitation in recommending the National Broadcasting Company to the people of the United States.

It will need the help of all listeners. It will make mistakes. If the public will make known its views to the officials of the company from time to time, we are confident that the new broadcasting company will be an instrument of great public service.

RADIO CORPORATION OF AMERICA

The Girls' Drum Corps (above) was but one of the music projects the Larkin Co., Inc. organized for its employees. Larkin also had community singing on Mondays, an orchestra, ukulele club, and daily recitals on a 4-pipe manual organ.

INDUSTRIAL SINGING GROUPS AND BANDS

"A few good songs break down barriers and create a friendlier and warmer atmosphere at our meetings."
— Harry D. Riley Company.

In the 1920s, companies organize in-house musical groups to facilitate company loyalty, keep employees happy, increase efficiency, establish good will with the public, and advertise the company name. According to one source, railroad companies and department stores have the most groups. Macy's, for instance, begins sales rallies with a group sing and ends them with a rousing stanza of "America." The store also holds an annual musical to "assemble a Macy audience interested in seeing Macy performers."

radios and early broadcasts feature classical music and other "civilizing" programming.

Between 1922 to 1925, *Printer's Ink*, a leading trade magazine, rails against radio as an "objectionable advertising medium" (perhaps in part because the editors focused on publishing). The journal emphasizes the dangers of creating public ill-will: "The family circle is not a public place, and advertising has no business intruding there unless it is invited." To sponsor a program as a public service is deemed commendable but advertisers fear a direct sales pitch would turn people off.

Advertisers thus find they can best gain brand recognition by naming shows and bands after products: the Royal Typewriter Salon Orchestra, A&P Gypsies, Lucky Strike Orchestra, Vick's Vap-o-rub Quartet, and the Cliquot Club Eskimos. Palmolive Soap goes whole hog by renaming its soloists (Frank Munn and Virginia Rea) Paul Oliver and Olive Palmer. Unknown artists are preferred over vaudeville performers so they don't compete for name recognition.

1920

Singer Vaugn De Leath originates "crooning," a method of singing that is adapted to match the limited range of early radio equipment. Until now, high soprano notes have often broken delicate transmitter tubes.

1922

The first commercially sponsored radio program is broadcast on WEAF. Mr. Blackwell of the Queensboro Corporation discusses the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne and the possible influence of communities such as Queensboro's "Hawthorne Court" apartments on his writing.

1923

John R. Brinkley opens KFKB in Milford, Kansas, and finds fame and fortune by plugging his goat-gland medicine on air. KFKB also gives Brinkley a vehicle to promote himself for state office. Using a hillbilly band in his campaigns, Brinkley becomes one of the most powerful forces in the state.

When the FCC fails to renew his license, Brinkley moves to Del Rio, Texas, and launches the first Mexican border radio station, XER, in 1931. Operating outside U.S. jurisdiction, XER and the "X" stations that followed broadcast a steady stream of pitches for Resurrection Plants, autographed portraits of Jesus, prayer cloths, baby chicks, "genuine simulated" diamonds, and hillbilly and gospel songbooks.

1926

The first radio jingle: Wheaties.

1928

As indirect advertising thrives, advertisers experiment with "direct advertising." The NAB then declares that no commercials may be broadcast between 7 p.m. and 11 p.m. ("family hour"). The rule doesn't last long. Once the stock market crashes in 1929, the need to sell takes over and buying becomes a patriotic duty. By 1929, insistence on sponsorship only dies. Guardians of radio's sanctity ask only for moderation.

1925

Cliquot Club Ginger Ale sponsors "Cliquot Club Eskimos" over the fledgling NBC network. According to NBC, "[Since] ginger, pep, sparkle and snap were qualities that form the very essence of the product . . . manifestly, peppy musical numbers of lively tempo were in order."

1926

To pay for transmitting programs between stations, national radio networks begin a campaign to promote broadcast advertising. "In the process, [the campaign] developed the concept that time, as well as space, could be bought and sold for commercial purposes."

1930

Country music becomes identified as the primary medium through which advertisers can reach rural audiences. It's especially important for medical treatments: Alka-Seltzer, Black Draught (laxative), Wine of Cardui (for "women's complaints"). The biggest advertiser: Crazy Water Company, which sponsors fourteen stations in the South, several bands (Crazy Hickory Nutes, Crazy Mountaineers, etc.), and the "Crazy Barn Dance." Around this time, some stations—particularly small, rural ones—start relying on "Per Inquiry" accounts. These stations receive royalties based on the number of inquires they get for an advertised product.

1931

The Light Crust Doughboys are born when the soon-to-be-king of western swing Bob Wills and his fiddle trio are hired to advertise Light Crust Flour on KFJZ in Fort Worth, Texas. When not performing, Wills et al. work for the flour company as dock loaders, truck drivers, and salesmen. Five years later, after several lineup changes (Wills was gone), the man who hired them quits Light Crust and starts his own flour company, Hillbilly Flour. His new sales team: the Hillbilly Boys.

Juke box manufacturers prosper during the war. In a string of 1940s trade ads, Wurlitzer promotes juke boxes' unique ability to lure customers.

1932

Kellogg's conducts a hugely popular Singing Lady promotion where people send in box tops for the Singing Lady song book. According to a Kellogg's memo: "This entire program is pointed to increase consumption—by suggesting Kellogg cereals, not only for breakfast but for lunch, after school and the evening meal."

1934

Muzak, the leader in "business music" services, is founded.

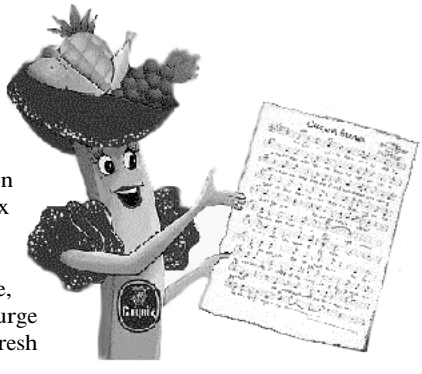
1939

FCC issues list of program taboos, including astrology; obscenity; solicitation for funds; and false, misleading, or too much advertising. The government frowns upon playing music over the air as a waste and for being deceptive. (Stations often pretended they were broadcasting live with major stars in the studio.) FCC rules require stations to identify recorded broadcasts.

1940

BMI forms and welcomes everyone ASCAP turns down: Appalachian musicians, fiddlers, blues singers, etc. Professional recognition goes to the vast body of American music outside the commercial mainstream. In 1940, ASCAP withdraws all its music from the air so radio stations turn to BMI records. The public is eager for this music!

1941

"Pepsi-Cola Hits the Spot" is the first jingle played on network radio. Pepsi releases more than one million copies for jukeboxes. Still, it's no match for the Chiquita Banana jingle, which *Time* magazine declares "The undisputed No. 1 on the jingle-jangle hit parade." The Chiquita jingle is played 376 times a day on the radio. Versions by the King Sisters, the Five DeMarcos, and Patti Clayton (almost 1 million records sold) are jukebox hits. In 1945, in cooperation with the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, the lyrics are revised to urge Americans to eat more fresh fruit and vegetables.

1945

J. Harold Ryan, president of the National Association of Broadcasters, commemorates the 25th anniversary of broadcasting with these words: "American radio is the product of American business! It is just as much that kind of product as the vacuum cleaner, the washing machine, the automobile, and the airplane. . . . If the legend still persists that a radio station is some kind of art center, a technical museum, or a

little piece of Hollywood transplanted strangely to your home town, then the first official act of the second quarter century should be to list it along with the local dairies, laundries, banks, restaurants, and filling stations.''

1950

The Lucky Strike radio show—a music staple since the '30s—is reincarnated as a successful NBC-TV show. The regular cast of singers, the Lucky Strike Gang, entertains viewers with ''the songs most heard on the air and most played on the automatic coin machines,'' which the TV audience was assured represented ''an accurate, authentic tabulation of America's taste in popular music.'' The decisions were actually made by Lucky Strike's ad agency, BBDO.

1950

Actress Tallulah Bankhead wins $5,000 from Proctor & Gamble after charging that a jingle about ''Tallulah, the tube of Prell shampoo'' damaged her career.

1950

The Weavers hit #1, setting up folk music as a lucrative commercial genre. Groups with names like the Cumberland Three, the Chad Mitchell Trio, the Wayfarers, the Travelers, etc., follow, cashing in by copywriting public domain material. The Kingston Trio tops the charts a decade later with their album *Sold Out*.

1950s

Morris Levy and Alan Freed try to trademark the term ''rock and roll.''

1955

The third time it is released, Bill Haley's ''Rock Around the Clock'' hits #1, the only legit rock song in the Top Ten that year. Initially, the song bombed. It was only after appearing in the movie *The Blackboard Jungle* that it struck gold, establishing rock and roll as a commercial genre

1956

Stan Freberg begins career as a radio adman singing jingles that make fun of singing jingles. An early example of anti-ad ads.

SOUNDALIKES

Since the rights to hits don't come cheap (or easy), companies often hire unknowns to make sound-alike versions. Before 1988, such imitations practically had free legal reign. This changed in 1988, when Bette Midler sucessfully sued Ford Motor over imitating her voice in a commercial. In 1992, the 9th Circuit Court built upon the Midler decision, awarding $2.4 million to Tom Waits. Waits had turned down an offer from Frito-Lay to make a commercial, but the company made it using a sound-alike singer, and so Waits sued. And then in 1994, in New York, a federal disctict judge found in favor of the Fat Boys, who sued Miller Lite in 1988 for using look- and sound-alikes.

1956

Ralston-Purina company commissions an ''original'' rock song to sell cereal: *Who-ho-ho-ho / rock that roll / And roll that roll / Get that Ralston in the bowl.*

1957

American Bandstand joins ABC Television and becomes the single most powerful record promotion since the advent of Top 40 radio. *Bandstand* sells more records than any previous avenue of exposure.

1959

Rock and roll dies.

1960s–70s

Corporations embrace albums as a tool for motivating sales staffs. These albums, or ''industrial musicals,'' unlike jingles, are for company in-house use rather than for consumers. Selections from *The Wide New World* with Ford (1960) from the Ford Motor Company; *Tunes for Toppies* (1972) from Mary Kay Cosmetics; *The Spirit of Achievements* (1976) from Exxon, and others have been compiled on a bootleg CD, *Product Music*.

Corporations also churn out LPs as promotional items to give to customers: Colonel Sanders' *Tijuana Picnic* (Kentucky Fried Chicken), *Introducing the Sugar Bears* (Sugar Crisps), Rodney Allen Rippy's *Take Life a Little Easier* (Jack in the Box), and *Music to Light Your Pilot Light By* (Heil-Quaker Corporation), to name but a few.

1960

Payola declared illegal. Alan Freed crucified.

1961

Ad copywriter Richard Blake joins Epic Records and Lester

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE?

In the '50s, the earlier habit of blurring programming and advertising fades for a number of reasons but we'll cite three:

1. Competition from television. Since TV's visuals make it better for comedy and drama, radio starts relying more on music. To maximize effienciency, radio starts dividing its audience up into targetable chunks. TV, afterall, is the ideal medium for reaching the mass audience. If any advertiser wants to reach both the rural Southern mom and the wealthy urban sophisticate, TV is the way. So, recognizing its strengths, radio goes "niche" rather than mass. For the first time, stations adopt formats. (Top 40 is developed in 1953.) Sponsored programs and bands fade because maintaining a coherent format is nearly impossible when advertisers create the programming. Radio from here on out uses music for target marketing. Like race, gender, and education level, musical taste helps type a buyer. The radio formats such as Modern Rock, AOR, and AA that eventually result cater to single genres of music—despite surveys showing that most people like different styles of music—because its the best way to segment "demos."

2. In the late '50s, TV quiz show scandals rock broadcasting. All three TV networks re-organize. The president of CBS decries that everything on CBS be "what it purports to be," even ordering that canned laughter and applause be identified as such. Although most of the outrage is directed at TV, radio plays defense as well (but don't ask us for proof).

3. Rock and roll ideology.

Lanin's orchestra in releasing *Lester Lanin and His Orchestra Play the Madison Avenue Beat.* The album cover encourages buyers to "have fun listening and dancing to 58 radio and TV commercials."

1964

The Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night* presages MTV with its quick-cutting action loosely based around songs.

1960s

Scattered back-and-forth action between jingles and the pop charts goes on. Predicting that "muscle cars" would be the next big thing, General Motors PR man John DeLorean commissions a song about the new Pontiac. That song, "Little GTO," (1964) becomes a Top 40 hit. . . . Voice-over deity Ken Nordine records *Colors* (1967), an album inspired by his series of Fuller Paint commercials. . . A song in a bank commercial catches Richard Carpenter's ear and the Carpenters decide to release their own version. "We've Only Just Begun" (1969) tops the charts. . . . A Coca-Cola commercial becomes a hit single, "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing (in Perfect Harmony)," by the New Seekers (1971). Pepsi's releases its equivalent: Bob Crewe's "Music to Watch Girls By."

1965

The doctrine of repetition expands from advertising to radio itself as the Drake format, with its tight thirty-record playlist and strict devotion to playing the same crap over and over. Stations said to play Top 40 or Hot 100 actually play a much smaller number of hits. Ironically, the format lends itself to fewer commercials per hour. (Three years later, Drake-Chanault's American Independent Radio division supplies taped programming to stations and contributes to eliminating local deejays.)

Also this year: the Newport crowd boos Dylan for plugging in, wearing an overpriced motorcycle jacket, and fancy boots. (bad joke stolen from Chuck Eddy)

1966

Over thirty college marching bands add the Hertz-Rent-A-Car "In the Driver's Seat" jingle to their repertoire. Hertz officials proudly claim that 3.5 million college football fans are exposed to their theme during half-time.

1967

Carbonated beverages are big on music. The Troggs, Marvin Gaye, the Supremes and Ray Charles are among the popular artists who record Coke commercials. Others: Everly

Major labels get hip to the counterculture: Columbia's infamous "The Man Can't Bust Our Music" ad from a 1968 issue of Rolling Stone.

Brothers, Otis Redding, Box Tops, and Leslie Gore. Pepsi (“The Pepsi Generation”) and 7-Up are more ambitious than Coke, appropriating countercultural imagery and rock and roll.

The Who Sells Out intersperses “real” songs with spoofs of spots for Heinz baked beans, Medac pimple cream, Rotosound strings, Premier drums, and Odorono deodorant. Thirty years later, the CD reissue appends some actual commercials the Who recorded.

1976

Malcolm McLaren manufactures a rock group to mock the manufacturing of rock groups: the Sex Pistols.

1980

Unknown crooner Slim Whitman goes double platinum without radio airplay or record store sales and a new era in direct-response television marketing is born. While TV and mail order had long been used to sell music to the masses (K-Tel, Time/Life series, etc.) Whitman’s string of “buy now!” commercials upped the ante. Suffolk Marketing, Whitman’s “label,” goes on to advertise collections by Boxcar Willie (who made his public debut on *The Gong Show*), Nana Mouskouri, Zamfir (“Prince of the Pan Flute”) and more . . . *not available in stores!*

What kind of music do you like best?
“The most popular man alive”—that’s what Bing Crosby was voted in a recent nationwide poll! On his sparkling new variety show, Bing’s at his tip-top best—and weekly guest stars include such favorites as Bob Hope, Jimmy Durante, Judy Garland (Wednesday, 10 p.m. EST, 9 p.m. in all other zones). (Philco.)
Music of the masters—brilliantly interpreted by masters of music! Don’t miss conductor Karl Krueger and the magnificent 95-piece Detroit Symphony Orchestra in The Sunday Evening Hour—a series of uninterrupted full-hour broadcasts. Every Sunday evening, 8-9 p. m. EST. (Musical Digest.)
Grand Opera is all its breath-taking majesty! Every Saturday afternoon during the opera season, ABC invites you to thrill to the world’s greatest opera stars, the world’s most glorious music—direct from the stage of “the Met.” Plus the stimulating entr’acte features, The Opera Quiz, Opera Notes on the Air, and The Opera Round Table with famous guests participating. (Sponsored by The Texas Company.) Above: the noted Wagnerian tenor Lauritz Melchior in one of his greatest roles, as Tristan in Tristan and Isolde.
Kick back the rug and everybody dance to the “swing and sway” music of Sammy Kaye’s popular orchestra. The inimitable Sammy broadcasts on Sammy Kaye’s Serenade (Sunday, 1:30 p. m. EST) (Richard Hudnut) and on the lively As You Want to Lead a Band program (Monday, 9:30 p. m. EST).
Wonderful things happen when Inez Carillo and duo-pianists Cy Walter and Walter Gross play every Saturday (11:30 a. m. EST) on Piano Playhouse. Exciting music, celebrated guest stars and “that eminent musicologist” Dr. Milton Cross. (The scene above is all in fun, but a sample of the fine music you’ll hear!)
Your all-time favorites are played in your favorite way by the “Dean of Modern American Music” himself, Paul Whiteman. The whole family will delight in the Paul Whiteman Hour: popular melodies of yesterday and today, as only “Pops” can play them, and sung by leading soloists (Wednesday 9 p. m. EST).
You’ll applaud great symphonic music every Tuesday evening (8:30—9:30 p.m. EST) when the world-famous Boston Symphony Orchestra broadcasts on ABC. Conducted by Dr. Serge Koussevitzky, this celebrated orchestra brings you the finest of the moderns as well as the masters. (The John Hancock.)
You shall have music . . . the effortless, friendly voice of “Der Bingle” . . . the melodious rhythm of Rex Maupin . . . the breath-taking excitement of an aria by Lily Pons . . . the charm and gaiety of such musical treats as Wake Up and Smile, the Music Library, the Johnny Thompson Show and others. Yes, music on your local American Broadcasting Company station is music the way you like it . . . music at its best.
Yet ABC does not deserve your attention for music alone. The network has outstanding programs of every type, in every field. Programs like the distinguished Theatre Guild on the Air; the deeply moving Greatest Story Ever Told; the thrilling public service program This Is Your FBI and Darts for Dough, good fun for studio audience and listeners alike. Discover for yourself that there’s always top-notch entertainment when you dial your local ABC station.
What makes a good network?
A network is known by the company it keeps: the calibre of its sponsors determines in great measure the calibre of its programs. ABC has its full share of top shows on the air because its roster of sponsors reads like a blue book of American industry. U. S. Steel, Equitable Life, Quaker Oats, Procter & Gamble, Goodyear, Miles Laboratories and Wavemen Pens are only a few of the outstanding sponsors that are on ABC because they find the network is an effective and economical way of selling goods nationally.
Listen to ABC
American Broadcasting Company
A NETWORK OF 238 RADIO STATIONS SERVING AMERICA

As late as 1947, ABC’s radio network could still boast that its stations played a variety of music styles. This changed once TV became competition, and radio turned to niche single-genre formats.

1982

Jovan/Musk Oil sponsors the Rolling Stones’ U.S. tour. for a million dollars. Marketers start using more rock and roll tie-ins.

1981

MTV introduces itself in a *Billboard* ad as “the Biggest Advertising Merger in History.” The merger, that is, of stereo and television. Although not so obvious at first, MTV represents a throwback to the days where programming and advertising are one and the same. Its impact on commercial culture is well documented. MTV, basically:

1. Changes the language and look of television and advertising
2. Makes visuals and imagery key to popular music
3. Inspires *Footloose*
4. Lowers the age of music consumers
5. Makes young rock fans more accepting of commercial tie-ins than fans in their 30s and 40s

Initially hesitant to launch merchandising lines for fear of alienating its audience, MTV begins cashing in on spin-offs in 1992. The network scores in 1993 with Beavis and Butt-head, “the Mickey Mouse of the MTV empire,” according to the *Wall Street Journal.*

1985

Pepsi hits with Michael Jackson; people confuse the commercial with the music video. And misses with Madonna, whose “Like a Prayer” video excites the Christians (boycott threats, etc.) and convinces Pepsi to call the relationship off. An anti-censorship group calling themselves Fundamentalists Anonymous responds to the Madonna cancellation by calling for a Pepsi boycott.

1985

Nike uses the Beatles’ “Revolution” for a commercial and causes a stir, but ultimately counts the move as a victory, claiming only 200 letters of complaint and a surge in sales (Yoko Ono originally supported the ad for helping “demystify” John Lennon but later helped Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr when they decided to sue). Advertisers respond by licensing pop hits with abandon. Jingles are out.

1985

After Bruce Springsteen releases smash-selling *Born in the U.S.A* (1985) and says no to advertisers, patriotic rock floods commercials. Other holdouts: Neil Young, Joan Jett, Chrissie Hynde, Bob Seger, Billy Idol, and John Mellencamp.

Mid-1980s

Boomer nostalgia for rock is in full gear as former hippies take

SOUNDTRACKS

Easy Rider (1969) is the first major movie with a rock compilation. It is followed by *American Graffiti*, a collection of oldies that hits #1. The big money strikes with *Saturday Night Fever* (1978), however, the best-selling album to date at that point. After *SNF*, movie producers and record execs recognize the potential of cross-marketing. In 1984, ten soundtracks go platinum and two, *Footloose* and *Purple Rain,* hold the #1 spot for more than half the year. Several trends develop: successful soundtracks spawn sequels (*More Songs from the Big Chill, Commitments Vol. 2, Before The Commitments*); Hollywood studios "synergize" and build soundtracks based on what music the parent company owns; and movies begin actively promoting the soundtracks in commercials. My favorite trend, however, would be the trend of using music in a commercial that is neither in the film or the soundtrack (usually "Bad to the Bone"). In 1998, soundtracks are still going strong, accounting for a hefty portion of album sales. Meanwhile, new artists are having a harder time establishing themselves.

over ad agencies. Before recognizing the impact of licensing the original hits, agencies hand-tailor lyrics. Thus, the Platters' "Only You" becomes "Only Wendy's"; the Diamonds' "Little Darlin'" becomes Kentucky Fried's "Chicken Little"; Buddy Holly's "Oh Boy" begats "Oh Buick!"; Jerry Lee Lewis' "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On" turns into Burger King's "Whole Lotta Breakfast Goin' On"; Danny and the Juniors' "At the Hop" becomes "Let's Go Take a [Granola] Dip"; "Mack the Knife" becomes "It's Mac Tonight"; and "Look What They've Done to My Song, Ma" becomes "Look What They've Done to My Oatmeal."

1986

More than any popular genre before it, hiphop embraces brand names. LL Cool J mentions Zest, Levi's, Air Jordons, Devon cologne, Thom McAn, Jaguar, Cracker Jack, and others on his Top 10 album *Bigger and Deffer.* Run DMC charts with "My Adidas" and becomes the first rap act to lead a national TV campaign (for, yep, Adidas). The Fat Boys turn down six-figure offers from Coke and Burger King for TV commercials (to avoid becoming "overexposed").

There is, however, resistance among advertisers to using rap. Says a music director at one ad agency, "The biggest job we have is convincing the client that it's not race music and the artists aren't necessarily angry." Still, he reports, times have changed: "In the '70s we had to stay away from music that would turn off white folks, so we never, say, went into a James Brown style. Now everyone accepts James Brown"

Rolling Stone founds *Marketing Through Music* newsletter to promote using rock music to sell consumer goods, particularly to a young adult audience. At the time, it is still fairly uncommon to see a TV commercial that uses rock and roll.

Inspired by MTV, several companies—namely, Yamaha, Max Factor, and Diet Coke—promote contests with the grand prize of appearing in a music video. Max Factor doesn't announce what group the video will feature. "It doesn't really matter," says one VP. "The kids just want the chance to be in a rock video."

1987

Teen pop idols have long been passé, but sixteen-year-old Tiffany revives the spirit with the industry's first shopping mall tour. As part of Shopping Center Network's ten-city "Beautiful You" tour promoting Clairol products, Le Click cameras, and Toyota Motors, Tiffany goes from receiving zero radio attention to performing for a Salt Lake City mall crowd of 4,000. Young listeners call radio stations requesting her songs and *Tiffany*, the debut album, goes quadruple platinum.

1987

After a couple of major commercial tie-ins (namely, Ringo Starr's pitch for Sun Country coolers and the Rolling Stones' Jovan tour) prove financially disappointing, greater efforts are made to match music artists with targeted markets. Customized research companies such as Soundata/Street Pulse Groups sprout up to help clients such as Anheuser-Busch, Coke, and Seagrams get the right sounds.

1980s

Suffering post-disco burnout, Top 40 goes research crazy and starts targeting smaller and smaller segments of listeners. Record sales are not a good indicator of effective programming, because selling music is not the point. And many listeners are "passives," i.e., not looking for new music to buy. Thus, phone research becomes popular. Subjects are called at random, played excerpts of songs, and asked for their opinion.

1987

Heavy metal joins the ranks of advertiseable genres. Aerosmith's "Walk This Way" carries a Sun Country Cooler campaign and ZZ Top does Busch beer. . . . Meanwhile, New Age music is discovered as a way to target rich, white Boomers. Lincoln-Mercury, BMW, Acura, and Circuit City use New Age in commercials. Windham Hill, one of the top New Age recording labels, establishes a special licensing division for use by advertisers.

1987

Post-*Top Gun*, rock music becomes all the rage in military advertising. Rolling Stone's "Get Off of My Cloud" is used on a poster as part of a McDonnell Douglas campaign to promote its F/A-18 aircraft, as is the Lovin' Spoonful's "Do You Believe in Magic?" The purpose of the campaign—which the ad agency dubs "Rockin' and Rollin'"—is to coax government officials to keep buying $18-million aircrafts.

1988

Claymation California Raisins become celebrities after performing "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" in a series of commercials. Their version peaks at #84 on the charts. Much merchandise, including 4 CDs—even a 1-800-number—rides the hype.

1988

Neil Young's video "This Note's for You," a pointed swipe at corporate sponsorship, is banned by MTV, then voted "Video of the Year" at the 1988 MTV Music Video Awards. . . . Marketers, responding to a burgeoning Hispanic population, jump on Latin (or, uh, "Latin") music: Pepsi sponsors Miami Sound Machine's tour, Coke and Tecate beer tie in with Linda Ronstadt's *Canciones de Mi Padre* road show, and Michelob underwrites Emmanuel's fifteen-city Latin review. . . . A Levi's 501 campaign in Europe featuring original '60 hits inspires a classic rock resurgence on the European pop charts. Sam Cooke's "Wonderful World" is reissued and rockets to Number

One —eleven spots higher than the single hit in the U.S. twenty-five years earlier.

To counter its racist, far-right image, Coors sponsors reggae and World Beat events. Similarly, Reebok counters rumors of South African involvement by sponsoring Amnesty International's Human Rights Now! tour.

1991

Chuck D—a vocal critic of malt liquor marketing and the leader of Public Enemy—successfully sues St. Ides malt liquor for using his voice in a radio commercial . . . Ice Cube and other hiphop artists gladly accept St. Ides' money.

1992

Pillsbury Doughboy raps in a commercial.

Early 1990s

Kool cigarettes founds the Kool Jazz Fest to reinforce African Americans' interest in the brand. Kool execs are chagrined when whites outnumber blacks at the concerts, lessening their value as a target-marketing tool, and decides to cancel the fest.

1995

The *Village Voice* and Warsteiner beer team up to run a full-page beer ad/combo club listing/phone sampling system. Some of the listed bands help promote the beer, displaying a Warsteiner banner while on stage. The "Clubland" concept is soon emulated in alt.weeklies across the country.

Microsoft pays $3 to $12 million (depending on who's doing the reporting) to use the Rolling Stones' "Start Me Up" in a television commercial.

1996

Using computer software to automatically synethsize "Hot 100" song fragments, GT Technotracks Inc. in Saginaw, Michigan, churns out $8,000 jingles for car dealers. With this "statistically proven material," Technotracks promises clients the best of both worlds—a familiar sound with low-cost, royalty-free "original" songs.

FOREGROUND MUSIC

The story behind Muzak and its use of music as a psychological tool has been detailed elsewhere, notably in *Elevator Music*. Muzak, however, is only one part of an industry subset known as "music for business." In 1971, AEI Music determined that "real" music can be just as much of a tool for sales as elevator mush. Thus, AEI programs "foreground music" for stores such as the Gap, the Limited, and Starbucks. Unlike background/elevator music, AEI's tunes are made to be actively listened to. And unlike background music, foreground works as an branding tool, helping stores or restaurants define their image. It also helps draw the right crowd: rockers, ravers, boomers, jazz sophisticates, etc. Foreground music works as advertising, too. Starbucks, the Gap, and Borders sell house CD compilations of their music, allowing customers to bring the aura of the retail environment into their very own homes. For record companies, foregrounding provides another outlet for promotion.

Both AEI and Muzak share the same bottom line. AEI's founder describes the network as a communications and marketing company rather than a music provider. And their strategy has proved so successful that Muzak has gotten into foreground music as well.

1997

Trio's "Da Da Da" is unearthed for a Volkswagen commercial and hits the charts. Mercury reissues the band's mercifully forgotten self-titled LP and sells more than 300,000. . . . Payola resurfaces as record companies sponsor radio play for everything from individual songs to hour-long specials. . . . Techno appears in commercials before breaking the Top 10.

1998

Tired of trying to blur lines between content and advertising, MTV makes its programming policy explicit, promising companies more promotion with more ad spending. MTV's top ad exec John Popkowski dismisses what he calls arbitrary distinctions between paid advertising and what most viewers think of as programming. "Any and all exposure on MTV is a valuable commodity," he told the *Wall Street Journal*. Advertising, in other words, *is* programming. Same thing goes for MTV's new challenger, Access Entertainment. In fact, all the programming on the new music-themed cable channel is co-produced by advertisers at record labels, retailers, and magazine publishers. Sample programming: *Spin Television* (from *Spin* magazine); *Inside Tracks* (from Best Buy); and *Cafe Sound* (from A&M Records).

SFX Entertainment takes over the pop concert market, controlling 22 of the nation's top 50 markets with plans to operate stages in all 50. Envisioning live concert audiences as neatly segmented, target markets, the company plans to make its money by pursuing more corporate sponsorships or tours, introducing luxury boxes at amphitheaters, and creating more spaces for advertising at events.

Read the papers for the rest. We're out of room!

SELECT SOURCES

For readability's sake, we took out the footnotes. If you'd like to see an earlier draft with the footnotes in, write or email and I'll send you a copy. Much thanks to Douglas Wolk for reading this over. Below is a partial list of sources. Of these books, Barnouw's comes the closest to dealing with music's relationship to advertising head-on (although none of them do, really). About half the timeline came from newspaper and magazine articles and I'm too tired to type them all.

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On Silence

The twentieth century is, among other things, the Age of Noise. Physical noise, mental noise and noise of desire — we hold history's record for all of them. And no wonder; for all the resources of our almost miraculous technology have been thrown into the current assault against silence. That most popular and influential of all recent inventions, the radio is nothing but a conduit through which pre-fabricated din can flow into our homes. And this din goes far deeper, of course, than the eardrums. It penetrates the mind, filling it with a babel of distractions, blasts of corybantic or sentimental music, continually repeated doses of drama that bring no catharsis, but usually create a craving for daily or even hourly emotional enemas. And where, as in most countries, the broadcasting stations support themselves by selling time to advertisers, the noise is carried from the ear, through the realms of phantasy, knowledge and feeling to the ego's core of wish and desire. Spoken or printed, broadcast over the ether or on wood-pulp, all advertising copy has but one purpose — to prevent the will from ever achieving silence. Desirelessness is the condition of deliverance and illumination. The condition of an expanding and technologically progressive system of mass production is universal craving. Advertising is the organized effort to extend and intensify the workings of that force, which (as all the saints and teachers of all the higher religions have always taught) is the principal cause of suffering and wrong-doing and the greatest obstacle between the human soul and its Divine Ground.

Aldous Huxley
Silence, Liberty, and Peace (1946)

I'M WITH THE BRAND

THE CONSUMER AS FAN (AND VICE VERSA)

There's a parallel moment in nearly every episode of *FANatic*, MTV's new show that hooks up obsessed fans with their idols. Fan—upon meeting Celebrity—gains composure long enough to launch into a spiraling testimony about how Celeb has changed Fan's life. Sometimes there's a former drug problem, dead parents, depression, or poverty. In the midst of such catharsis, the stars come off as normal, reasonable, dull—real people after all. Though "very MTV," formula alone can't account for the stunning similarities of the testimonies, which usually include bromides gleaned from Celeb's lyrics or interviews: Follow Your Heart; Strivers Achieve What Dreamers Believe; Be True to Yourself, Stay in School, Love Your Mother.

To the viewer—or anyone other than the fan, really—whether these beliefs were inspired by Van Halen or Susan Lucci (still waiting for the Strom Thurmond episode) is strangely irrelevant. The difference resides in the fanatic's head. Every so often even the star, instead of smiling appreciatively, will suggest that they're not all Fan imagines: "No, Johnny, *you* earned that A+" or "No, *you* got your life together, not me."

It's funny, but watching these testimonies to celebrity night after night undermines the very myth that makes them work: the belief that the object of affection *matters*. Said object could just as well be a foxy college professor, Jesus, or a brand of tennis

Photos and text from MTV's FANatic website

"Cindy Crawford has influenced me so much. Because of her I have started thinking about my future. I raised my grades in school and started looking for jobs in the paper everyday. She's helping me to change my life." — HHKCheer16

"At one point in my life, I was seeing a counselor and spent every moment fighting off the urge to kill myself. One day I took a listen to a song I had heard a thousand times before, "100 Years" by Blues Traveler . . . I'll tell ya, it made me realize that no matter what was going on around me, I shouldn't let it hit me too hard." — Jeremy B.

"Last Christmas, my mom died. I didn't think I could make it and then one night I was watching TV and saw Carmen Electra on [MTV's] *Singled Out*. She was so beautiful, that for an instant, I got my mind off of my mom." — Fusion1599

shoes. Small wonder the pithy lessons gleaned from Celebs resemble ad slogans. The fanatic narrative, so fitting for MTV, is like that of commercials, with the stars working magic in the same way products do. Image is everything. Nike, Macintosh, Coke, Pepsi, Disney, whatever works for you.

She won't be on *FANatic* anytime soon, but Pepsi Girl Heather Denman drinks fourteen cans a day, paints her fingernails with Pepsi logos, chooses her dates based on whether they drink Pepsi or Coke, and surrounds herself with Pepsi paraphernalia. The good people at Pepsi have even flown her to Hollywood for a Generation Next party.

Diehard Macintosh users are known as Evangelists for their zealous promotion of Macintosh products and circulation of lists such as Famous Mac Users and Why Mac Kicks Windoze Butt. Among Nike devotees, getting a tattoo is practically de rigueur. One fan, Claudia Montgomery, 37, sent me a letter she'd written (but never sent) to Nike chronicling her battle with drug abuse and eventual recovery through softball. She writes: "I am one of your most loyal customers. My closet is full of shoes and clothes. I guess one could say I have traded addictions. At least this one is healthy."

Pepsi Girl Heather Denman drinks 14 cans a day, paints her fingernails with Pepsi logos, chooses her dates based on whether they drink Pepsi or Coke, and surrounds herself with Pepsi paraphernalia.

The fact that consumer brands should inspire fans as devoted as those of musicians and celebrities makes sense in a way. Hollywood and Madison Avenue have long competed for each other's territory. Movies are long commercials, commercials are quickie movies.

Michael Jordan, Madonna, and the Spice Girls are not only themselves products (or brands) but ads. Buy the album. See the movie. Wear the cologne. Watch TV. A recent *New York Times* article suggests that Rosie O'Donnell—herself a vocal fan of theater—is the best ad Broadway could have, in the same way Oprah is the best ad books can have. This isn't strictly endorsement, which assumes that the one doing the endorsing is outside the picture. This is more like borrowing Snap! Crackle!, and Pop! to sell milk instead of cereal. As *Advertising Age* puts it: stars today don't sell brands, they *are* brands.

And brands, in turn, are human. Personification may be nothing new—Mr. Jenkins is only a recent addition to the pantheon starring Mickey Mouse and Tony the Tiger. But personification is only the most

"Bryan Adams's music has taught me that life does go on after you've lost someone. Within the past year I have lost four relatives, three very close friends and a close teacher of mine, due to a drunk driver . . . I sang "Everything I Do" at my [relative's] funerals and it made me realize that no matter what I do I have 8 angels looking out for me."
— S. Cheehy

"I used to do drugs on a daily basis and now I have changed my life around by watching Ozzy. I missed so much of my life that I hope and pray that someday I might be able to work for a drug abuse clinic to help others to change their life around like Ozzy has for me."
—Melanie O.

"The Wallflowers helped me grow closer to my brother. He likes Alternative, and I like Pop, but with the Wallflowers, we can enjoy the same songs!"
— Tvtweety10

obvious method. Most brands work by acquiring social traits in one form or another. Market researchers frequently strategize by asking consumers, "If Vaseline were a person, what kind of person would she be?" "If you were at a party, whom would you rather talk to: Cadillac or Volkswagen?" Why? Because no one buys yellow carbonated sugar water or four-wheeled hunks of metal. They buy Mountain Dew or Saturn.

As a metaphor for consumption, though, *FANatic* is incomplete. Where are the cynics? And the dirt diggers? Most Pepsi drinkers don't collect used cans for wallpaper.

And in fact many of those cheering for celebrities joke about it. Internet followers of Ariel—the full-figured cartoon protagonist of *The Little Mermaid*—formed a group called Arielholics Anonymous to treat their "dangerous addiction." The Web site reads: "Can you recite the movie, the TV episodes, and all the songs by heart? Do you have urges to rub warm olive oil over Ariel? Did you need to take out a loan to pay for your expenditures on Ariel merchandise? . . . then you need help fast!"

She writes: "I am one of your most loyal customers. My closet is full of shoes and clothes. I guess one could say I have traded addictions. At least this one is healthy."

Fans of Mentos have written at length about the company's campy commercials, analyzing them for hidden meanings, staking out obscure details behind their creation, and sharing "Real-life Mento Moments." A lengthy Mentos FAQ—complete with company history, jingle lyrics, "Flavor Considerations," eating instructions, fan fiction, and loads of minutiae—is available on one of several Mentos Web sites.

Warm olive oil . . . ?

Whether these folks are any less obsessed than die-hard "Disneyaniacs," Mac Evangelists, or Nike lovers is arguable. They are, however, ironic rather than earnest. You can be obsessed as long as you do it with a self-awareness of being obsessed . . . a response advertising actually encourages. Ads all but beg to be read ironically: the "not believing" is built right in. That sense of detachment flatters us and keeps us watching.

Joshua Gamson is a Yale professor who's written about the way audiences increasingly crave info about the manufacture of fame. "The process is a story in itself," says Gamson. Look at the *Entertainment Weekly* stories dissecting Eddie Murphy's "image 'recovery strategy' " and the anti-ads (Sprite's "Image is Nothing," Miller Lite's Dick) that make fun of advertising. The exposure of artifice—rather than turning us away from commercial culture—engages us in other ways. When authenticity is irrelevant, we can see the celebs/ads as prefabricated jokes and remain wholly entertained. Witness all the anti-Hanson, anti-*Titanic* ("the Titanic sank, let's move on"), anti-Tamagotchi zines and Web sites. Of course, people focused on hating the Spice Girls—and collecting pictures, building Web sites, and making jokes about hating the Spice Girls—are nonetheless focused on the Spice Girls. Their criticisms don't challenge consumption; they suggest we're not consuming *the right stuff*.

"Everything is in terms of consumption," says Gamson (who, for the record, loves the Spice Girls, hates Disney, and suspects Julia Roberts could turn him straight). What's disturbing, he argues, is not that we use consumption symbols to create and communicate—but the fact that that's all we use. Commercial symbols clearly address real, human needs. But the solution they provide to meet them leads on a treadmill to nowhere. How to transcend mere fandom (or prove inspiration)? Be a bigger fan. To stand out from the audience, watch more, collect more, and whatever you do, be visible about it!

Stepping off the treadmill means not simply exposing and countering ads or TV shows, but creating real alternatives to commercial culture. For instance? Um, we're working on it. Meanwhile . . . Jazzercise? — *Carrie McLaren*

Nike Inc.
One Bowman Dr.
Beavertown, Oregon
97005

Dear Nike Inc.:

I have been thinking about this for some time now, so I decided to put it on paper. I have an idea for a commercial/advertisement. I am sure that you receive many letters like this, so I will be as brief as possible. First, a little background on myself. That way maybe then you will understand my idea and thought a bit better.

I am 37. I grew up loving sports. I play basketball, volleyball, and softball. I have never been a gifted athlete. I just try my best to be as good as I can. As I matured my life took various turns, most not for the better. The sports that I loved so much faded with the increased use of drugs and alcohol. Self-destruction took over for many years. I am one of the lucky ones, because one day I looked in the mirror, and hated what I saw and what I had become. I had to do something about it or die that way. I admitted myself into a care unit, and began the agonizing process of rediscovery and recovery from my addictions. The years have passed and I am very grateful for all the people along the way, and the strength I found within myself to remain clean and sober for over 10 year now. I also quit smoking after 13 years. I once again enjoy the sports and things that I so once loved. Softball is now my sport as well as weightlifting. I enjoy every minute of it. I do it wearing Nike! I am one of your most loyal customers. My closet is full of shoes and clothes. I guess one could say I have traded addictions! At least this one is healthy.

I have watched your ad campaigns with great amazement. They can make one feel a wide variety of emotions. I love the one "If You Let Me Play Sports." Wow!! The one that featured Ric Munoz had to be an inspiration to many. I would like for you to think about my idea. I think that there is another sector of people that you could tap into. I know that if I saw it on TV, I would pay attention. It is an ad that would reach out to those that are still struggling with addictions and feeling lost. It is for those who have found themselves and started to live again. It is for those of us who are not that elite athlete, but one who puts all they have into trying to be the best that they can be in spite of any limitations. It is for those that truly believe in themselves.

I have a tattoo that is a reminder to me. It is Kanji writing with other ornamentals around it. It says "believe in yourself." A picture is enclosed. There is a Nike swoosh also. I have never believed in a company as much as I do Nike. It does many things for so many different people. So here is my thought, idea for a commercial.

"Somewhere, at this very moment, there is a man or a woman. They could be young, or they could be old. They feel as if they have lost their souls. It is a turning point in their life. They dig deep within to change themselves. To regain their soul, and to regain themselves. They do this because they realize they deserve better. They do this because they believe in themselves. I believe in me, do you believe in you?"

Even if you are to never use this, I have done a good thing. I have spoken what I feel inside. Not only about myself, but also about Nike. I thank you so much for your time. Keep the great products coming! I think I need an addition added on to my house. I have run out of closet space for all my Nike shoes.

Respectfully,

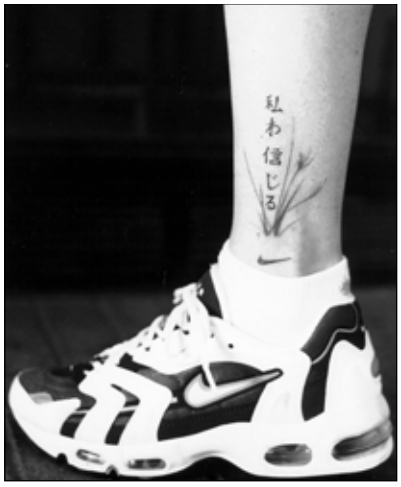
Claudia S. Montgomery

I'M WITH THE BRANDED (CONT.)

Claudia Montgomery's letter to Nike and (below) tattoo. In a letter to me (responding to an online post I'd made on a Nike bulletin board), she explained that the characters mean "To Believe in Oneself" more or less.

Bottom right: Heather Denman in her bedroom, an homage to Pepsi. (photo by John Renfield; from Bikini *magazine)*

Bottom left: Chris Herbst shows his Nike tattoo. Herbst hopes to get a job with Nike in South Africa.



A Big Bowl of Scabs: Rating the Knockoff Cereal Mascots

Who among us hasn't longed to live the glamorous, rich life of Toucan Sam? Or have the confident, devil-may-care aplomb of the dashing Tony the Tiger? Sure, we've all dreamed. However, most of us have the dignity not to try to slavishly imitate our morning heroes, contenting ourselves with the drab, weary existence that is life outside of a cereal box. Most grocery store chains, however, don't have such dignity. —Jason Torchinsky

TONY THE TIGER **THAT POLAR BEAR**

Tony is a tiger. The mascot of the Ralph's brand knockoff frosted flakes is a polar bear. You know what's interesting about tigers and polar bears? They both hunt and eat humans. This must be a key criteria for a sugar-frosted cornflake mascot. The bear mimics the wide, exuberant grin of Tony, and adds a pair of fangs, perhaps to provide that thinly veiled threat Tony's bulk provides.

KNOCKOFF RATING: C. Too derivative, and "frosted" refers to the sugar, not arctic climates. Jeez.

LUCKY **THAT WIZARD**

The key to marketing a bland, greyish cereal punctuated with colorful marshmallows seems to be midieval British Isles folklore. That would explain both Kellogg's Lucky Charm's leperachaun and the wizard of Ralph's Magic Stars. In this case, the knockoff actually seeks to one-up the original. As any D-and-D addled geek can tell you, a wizard could surely whip the green snot out of a leperachaun.

KNOCKOFF RATING: A-. Just as Irish-looking, but more powerful, and perhaps less selfish and annoying, but this could only be the result of not having any commercials to demonstrate his true personality.

TOUCAN SAM **THAT SNAKE**

I have a lot of personal fondness for Toucan Sam. I can't really explain why this is. Please just accept that for whatever reason, I like Sam. Which is maybe why I feel such contempt for his serpentine doppelganger. This multicolored snake of "Fruit Rings" has a certain slimy, obsequious quality I just can't abide. Maybe it's that hat, doffed smarmily with that creepy prehensile tail. Or maybe it's the way his green scales gleam on his head, or perhaps that, in nature, a snake with bright, vivid colors means STAY AWAY.

KNOCKOFF RATING: D. Stay away from my children, filthy serpent.

SNAP, ET AL. **THOSE BEAVERS**

The people who came up with a mascot for "Crisp Rice" weren't even trying. The token gesture toward the powerful triumvirate of crispy, noisy rice cereal characters is that there are a pair of beavers, instead of just one. That's it. It's not like there's a dearth of material, either. Snap! Crackle! Pop! could surely have suggested some other trio: three gnomes named Crack! Splutter! Click! for example. Or maybe three little aliens called Blap! Blorple! Bop!

KNOCKOFF RATING: F. Oh, and beavers make you think of eating wood, too. So there. Maybe they're squirrels.

Josta Freaks

John Blaylock—a psychology student at Oklahoma State University—is the creator of one of several websites devoted to Josta cola. Blaylock kindly answered my email inquiries.

Where did you first hear about Josta?

The summer of 1996. I came across it at a gas station, liked it, and told my friends about it. Only later did we start to see any advertising. We were kinda scared because Surge had gotten commercials and ads before Josta.

Why Josta and not, I dunno, Sprite?

Josta has this nice feeling in the throat. It goes down smooth and does not have that thick after-effect. Dark colas leave a harsh sticky feeling. Also, I have always been for the underdog. I have always believed that all good things come to an end, so buy up all that you can. It seemed that Josta was destined to die a quick death if there was no support for it. So we needed to show PepsiCo. that there was a market.

On your website, you say some people drink Josta because it's cool. How can you tell?

This is where my psychology background comes in. I could tell when there was a real desire for someone to drink, while others simply went along. Some of the people I know are rebellious, so they joined the underdogs. We sort of developed a Josta clique. Some of my other friends stayed with us for a few weeks then left to find another cool group to hang with. Sort of like sports fair-weather fans.

What's the deal with the Josta scavenger hunt?

I was living in the dorms as a resident assistant, and we were required to organize programs so I did a week-long event surrounding Josta. I called it a "Scave-Hunt" to make it a little bit more interesting and mysterious. This lead to two others scave-hunts.

What's sorta weird Josta stuff have you done?

We made a Jolta Kidew, a concoction of Jolt, Josta, Kick, and Mountain Dew. Most of the stuff on the purity tests have been done. A friend of mine made Josta Jello and coaxed the OSU president and school mascot into getting a picture taken holding a Josta. I've edited movie and television pictures to include Josta (where it shouldn't be). I've made a Josta clock. Friends have snorted Pixie Stix while drinking Josta. The coolest thing was when I got a Josta banner—my only illegal act to date. I was the hero of the day. I am really considering getting a panther tattoo, although tattooing is prohibited in Oklahoma. One of my friends bought a pair of white panties and dyed them in Josta. After that he glued parts of the can on to them. The front of the panties had the Josta logo, and the back had the story of Josta that is on the can. I bought them for sixty cents, and I don't really think I will ever wear them. Yes, I am obsessed. That is all I drink now. Long Live Josta! However, I do not need to have it everyday.

Azure Reznor, founder of a Virginia-based effort to "save Josta"

Have you had any contact with Pepsi people? Do they know about your website?

I tried to get sponsored for the Josta week, but the pissy receptionist was not helpful. I do not wish to tell The Company for fear that they would say that I am stealing images that have copyright. But I did get free 8 x 10 mini-posters directly from the main office.

What do you think about Josta commercials and advertisements?

Damn cool. The old guys wishing that they had done some rebellious acts in their childhood. I say do it. If your conscious gets in the way most of the time, take the steel rod out of your ass and live a little. I mean if you feel like dancing in class, do it, or if you feel like yelling in the middle of Wal-Mart just do it. Those commercials encourage anti-social behavior, to a point. I love the commercials. I want more stuff to collect, though.

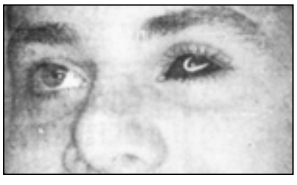
Does advertising affect your opinion?

Not really, I already love it to death. It does show me that there is a market for Josta and Pepsi will not "can" it soon. My wish is to actually own a Josta T-shirt and meet the Josta Team girl.

CELEBS

FREAKS &

MEDIA LIT



An interview with Joshua Gamson

Joshua Gamson loves contradictions, so much that he has made them the focus of two books: *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America* and *Freaks Talk Back: Talk Shows and Sexual Nonconformity*. And in both books, Gamson, a sociology professor at Yale University, ably negotiates between lefty social crit and cultural studies' celebration of pop culture. That is, while focused on how people use and make media, he doesn't lose sight of the institutions in which actions take place. A wise man. ■ In July, Gamson and I met and chatted at a cafe in Chelsea. Wouldn't you know, he has excellent table manners, too. —CM

Stay Free!: Fame has changed over the course of the century. People are no longer famous for what they've done, but simply for being famous. And there's been this shift away from celebrating character to celebrating personality. What are the main ways audiences have changed?

Joshua Gamson: The main way has to do with the increasing visibility of the manufacture of fame. Earlier on, it was more hidden, mainly because of the studio system, where image-making was tightly controlled. I don't want to exaggerate the naiveté of people at the time, but there was probably more reverence and admiration for stars—although, even then there was a tabloid-driven, tear-'em-down impulse taking shape. The process of making fame is now a story in itself.

And celebrity image-making isn't the only thing being "revealed." MTV analyzes how videos get made. Newspapers report on how publicity drives book publishing. What do you make of Rosie O'Donnell and her big effect on Broadway ticket sales? A *New York Times* article argued that her style of on-air plugging has replaced the role of critics. She's "the best ad that Broadway can have."

She's kind of a walking ad for TV itself. The trick is that this is an "actual person," so there's a narrative—her life as a regular gal—that makes her plugging work.

She's also like us. She's famous for being a fan.

Totally. It's more a case of identifying with her than admiring her, although the two aren't mutually exclusive.

So why do people cheer for celebrities? Do you think it's similar to the way people cheer for certain companies?

Well, there are different kinds of fans. Obsessive fans, the stereotype, have something going on—some deep, psychological need—that I don't really understand. Most people integrate celebrity-watching in their lives with a lot less reverence. I remember meeting a woman at an awards show in Los Angeles. She was all dressed up, almost in a ball gown, waiting for Richard Gere, and she was really different from the rest of the fans. For them, it was more like a game. This woman was focused on a fantasy. While that is encouraged by the system, it's an almost old-fashioned way of responding. You have to screen out so much information . . .

Well, yeah, but a lot of people do that.

It depends on what you mean by a lot. If you're talking about a proportion of the population, I don't think it's a lot.

But everyone reads selectively. I mean, we don't acknowledge things that don't fit our preconceptions. You know how cultural studies types talk about audience "poaching," for example, the Star Trek fans making up their own storylines and characters . . .

Sure. But, again, that's a different relationship than the sort of obsessive, reverent fan. That's a game mentality rather than an identification fantasy. Of course, the same people can have both reverence and fantasies. I think Julia Roberts could turn me straight. I don't know why. At the same time, I'm totally irreverent about it. I think the more extreme fan behaviors get played up a lot and that obscures the more common, and interesting, ways of relating to the celebrity system.

What about people wearing Nike logos? They're identifying with Nike.

That's people identifying with a commercial image and using it to communicate. But that's different than saying, "I *love* Tommy Hilfiger," or "Perry Ellis *is* America."

But, really, what does it matter whether they're buying the company line whole hog or playing a game if they're still focussed on it? I think the difference is largely a matter of degree. Sure, some people take it farther than others. Some pay an extra $20 for a certain brand, others invent elaborate fantasies. I just saw some guys that had plastered a huge Nike swoosh on their car. They obviously didn't buy it so it wasn't strictly for status.

"Everything is in terms of consumption. It's hard for people to imagine alternative ways to make themselves known to each other."

Right. It's not always about status, and it's more than just an "I believe in Nike" statement of brand loyalty. And, yes, on some level it doesn't really matter. Everything is in terms of consumption. That's what is truly disturbing. It's hard for people to imagine alternative ways to make themselves known to each other. I mean, there are rainbow flags all over here. It's the same basic thing—people marking themselves as a certain type of person, as gay or lesbian. It's become attached to marketing now, and there's a nationalism about being gay that I don't totally identify with, but I have a flag on my car. In a way that's not that different from marking yourself with . . .

What you buy?!?

Well, the *content* of what you're marking is different, but it's still communicating a symbol. For a time, at least, the flag was not used for advertising and consumption, which is sort of my point. The symbolic tools in our society are largely about consuming.

Because as soon as something that's not about consuming is created, it gets commodified.

Yes, but you need to look at what happens at the ground level. People are using available symbols in ways that they've always used available symbols. We need to understand that part of it and not just the corporate manipulation. What's disturbing is not that symbols are getting created—even if they're consumption symbols. People use what they use to communicate to each other, I don't fault them for using what's available.

But, really, who sees *only* corporate manipulation? A lot of critics emphasize that side not because they view audiences as passive receptors, but because these issues are so underrepresented elsewhere . . . whereas the joys of consuming most definitely aren't.

There's still plenty of room to point out corporate manipulation. But a lot of cultural criticism involves a bit of sneering at consumers.

In your conclusion to *Claims to Fame*, you discuss how the celebrity process is sustained by people who play games with media and who aren't all that concerned about what's real or fake, which is fine when it comes to entertainment. But when "game playing" is also the way people engage with politics or places where truth really *does* matter, it leaves no room for media criticism or reform.

Entertainment celebrity lends itself to game-playing because there aren't many consequences. And that's not the case for politics. There are signs that give me a little optimism, but I'm not so sure media criticism is the answer. Systems adapt, and one of the ways the star system has adapted is by integrating its own exposure into the system.

It incorporates the critique. People buy as much as ever, and use more media than ever.

Yes, that's how the system survives. It doesn't survive by suppressing dissent but by interesting people in things they are critical of. What sustains the system is people's actions within it—not their inaction and not their being duped. So when you do all this media literacy about it . . .

It just feeds the interest.

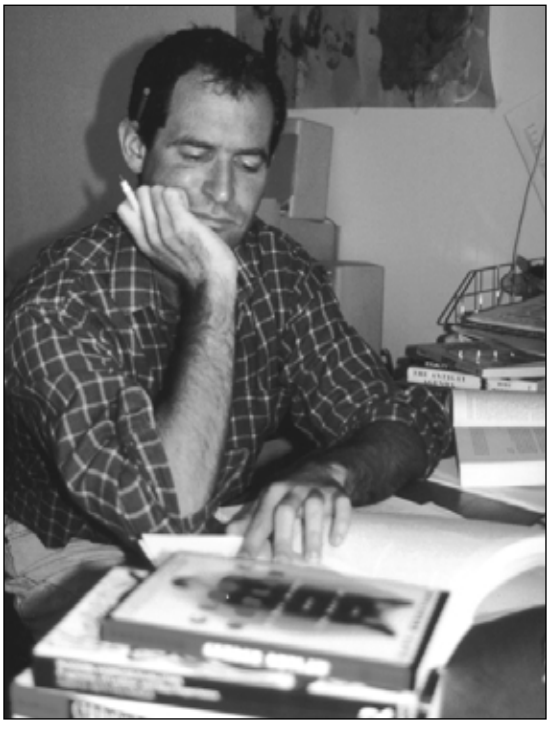
Yeah, and that's depressing. Other strategies are needed. A lot of the time media literacy gets pulled into the service of the entertainment industries.

So should critics just give up and call it a day?

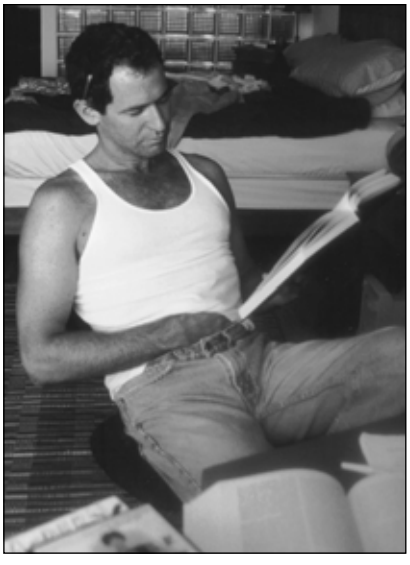
No. I'm still trying to figure that out. Maybe we

At Home with "Josh"

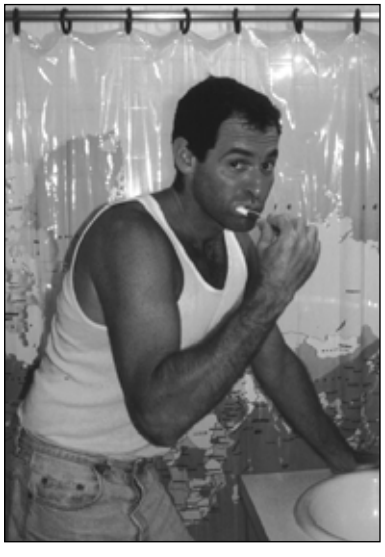
HE'S REAL!



Smart, good-looking, and unafraid to cry, Joshua Gamson is real, alright! Commuting back and forth to New Haven, Conn., is not a problem for Josh, who often works at home in New York.



"I'm just like everyone else when it comes to appreciating a good story," says Josh Gamson, who is real.



Morning time is brushing time. "Anything but gel," says Josh. "Good hygiene is important. And real people do this sort of thing."

There's nothing fake about getting dressed. Shown here looking at the camera and tying his shoes, Josh, whom light does not penetrate, readies himself for work.

Talk on the phone? Sure, why not. Josh has friends and is quick on the take with his humorous tales. "Have you heard the one about the bearded chicken?" he asks, illustrating his guy-next-door, three-dimensional realness.

"One of the ways the star system has adapted is by integrating its own exposure into the system. It doesn't survive by suppressing dissent but by interesting people in things they are critical of."

need new types of media literacy. The point is to create alternatives rather than just expose manipulation. I'm not pessimistic about people's capacities to live within the culture. And I don't think people are necessarily living terrible lives because of our focus on consumption. (When they're living terrible lives, it usually goes back to more old-fashioned forms of oppression and exploitation.) But you only get to alternatives when you take seriously where people are, taking into account the pleasures of consumption rather than telling people they shouldn't enjoy it. People are just going to say, "Fuck that." People *do* say, "Fuck that," and *I* say, "Fuck that!" I love the Spice Girls!

I don't mind the Spice Girls.

But talk about products! I mean, *I* could be a Spice Girl with the right manager.

They're not trying to be anything other than what they are.

Okay, so media criticism has worked. Here they are telling you that they're manufactured and fake.

But there are as many people focused on hating the Spice Girls as loving them. They're paying attention regardless.

Right. And people take a position.

You talk about celebrity-watching as a form of play. I agree that play is an essential part of life, but you don't seem willing to make any sort of value judgment.

I'm one of the most judgmental people I know!

But would you agree that some ways of playing are better than others? The book *Out of the Garden* (Steven Kline, Verso, 1993) comes to mind. It looks at ways kids play. They can play with blocks and refrigerator boxes on the one hand, or Power Rangers and Disney characters—which come with whole storylines and character traits. Kline argues that kids play with these differently, that character toys come with rules and limit imagination.

I agree. Now we're talking about kids, which is a bit different, but there are types of play that are less active, less creative, less self-determined.

I try to be accepting of what people choose but, you know, I hassle my roommate when he sits around literally all day playing video games.

Yeah, but it's not like there haven't been lazy people throughout history, right?

So what is one alternative?

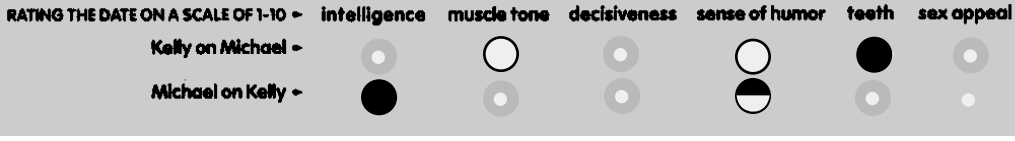
Alternative uses of media is one, zines for instance. Plug, plug. But I'm thinking beyond media. The option for a walk in the park is always there but it's not institutionalized or encouraged, really.

We should be creating alternatives, though. We shouldn't expect them to come to us.

Yes, part of the question is why people aren't doing that. And I think that might be more important than media criticism. Of course, some of the lack of energy for creating alternatives is a creation of television passivity. *I'll wait for alternatives to present themselves and in the meantime, I'll watch TV.* In terms of social change, I think it's much more impor-

Kelly Rutherford, 29
Born in Elizabethtown, Ky. Raised in Los Angeles and Newport Beach, Calif. Plays Megan Mancini on *Melrose Place*. Looking for compassion, humor and great sex.

Michael Bergin, 29
Born and raised in Naugatuck, Conn. Plays J.D. on *Baywatch*. Spokesperson for Liz Claiborne men's division. Dated high school sweetie on and off for 14 years.



Need some lovin'? Send us photos and tell us all your most personal info—maybe we'll pick you for the next date. (Tell your single guy friends to write in, too, okay?) Blind Date, *Jane*, 7 W. 34th St., New York, NY 10001.

tant for people to be putting energy into organizing different forms of spending their time. It sounds cheesy, but organize some people to go walking. It's the spirit of community gardens, which I love.

Me, too. So let's switch subjects and do talk shows. What was your agenda in writing *Freaks Talk Back*?

It was an ambivalent emotional response to begin with, to the shows and how disturbing they were in their representations of gay people and the excitement of seeing those representations on screen. And even more than that, the response to critics. On the one hand, I'm watching this stupid but extremely satisfying Ricki Lake show where the anti-gay bigots are coming off like a bunch of loons and the audience is cheering on the lesbians and gay men. And on the other hand I'm listening to Bill Bennett say talk shows are cultural rot. I'm thinking, "Uh-huh, you really want to shut *us* up, so why don't you just say that? The one crappy little place all kinds of 'freaks' and 'trash' get to be visible. . . " So there was an agenda to come out swinging in a talk show sort of way.

At your reading, you implied it was wrong to think talk shows are vulgar. Any shows I've seen, the people are so dumb, the shows are so exploitative and embarrassing . . .

Well, there are a lot of dumb and embarrassing people out there, and the evidence of exploitation is all over the book. I don't think it's wrong to think they're vulgar, but it's wrong to stop there. Plus, I guess I'm kind of a fan of certain kinds of "vulgarity."

Let's talk about your starting points. You start out acknowledging, yes, talk shows are exploitative, yes, they're there to make money. Yes, they're manufactured. But another one is the importance of media representation. And I was wondering if that should be an unquestioned given. For example, I'll hear women say "prime time TV sucks. There are no interesting women, there's no one on TV like me." Well, DUH. If you accept all these other givens—that TV is commercially motivated, that it's exploitative and formulaic—then why are you looking for deep, fleshed out, interesting characters there? There aren't going to be people like you.

Not necessarily.

Okay, *if* there's money to be made on people like you, there will be people like you.

Well, this is one of the things the book is about. Exploitation doesn't necessarily exclude in predictable ways. With talk shows, it has actually increased visibility for people most TV excludes. Do I think visibility should always be assumed to be a good thing? No. There's some freedom in being invisible. As visibility increases, certain problems get amplified. But being invisible, being written out of existence, is not something I'm going to advocate.

What about teaching people not to look for themselves in the mainstream media, on TV?

That can be very damaging, especially for people who are very isolated, to just say, "Get over it . . . "

Oh, c'mon, I'm not saying, "get over it." I'm saying look to other things.

But why do some people get to look for themselves and not others? And what other things are you offering?

Well, actual people—local organizations and groups.

What if those don't exist? I don't fully buy the statistics about higher suicide rates among gay, lesbian, and transgender teens but I know the damage of not having cultural imagery to locate yourself. And I know that thinking people like you don't exist, or that if they do they are ridiculous or hateful, can really be lethal. There are all kinds of obstacles at the grassroots level that are slowly being overcome, but in the mean time, there's nothing wrong with the shortcut of media visibility.

As a shortcut, I'm with you. But, at this point, if you want to see strong women in the real world, look around. Unless you live in a cardboard box, they shouldn't be difficult to find.

"I don't fully buy the statistics about higher suicide rates among gay teenagers, but I know the damage of not having cultural imagery to locate yourself."

But visibility in the mass media has been very important for a lot of women—less crucial now, but still important—who didn't have other models of being women, who were growing up in communities with rigid or traditional sex roles. Talk shows and media coverage of the feminist movement, for instance, were really important for that. I don't think people should give up the fight to diversify images in the mass media. Doing that is simply saying to people who have more power, "You get all the goods and I'm not going to expect to be dignified with affirmation that I exist."

I'm not talking about wanting media visibility but seeking that as an unquestioned given. To get back to what you were saying about alternatives to consumption and media literacy—alternative strategies for social change—I think this is an important one to consider: to rely more on flesh-and-blood people than the tube.

Yes, I would never want to see a political change strategy depend on an industry that has so little interest in political change. In the gay and lesbian movement, people have been naive in sticking with the idea that visibility is the end. It was great having Ellen come out, but it sometimes obscures the fact that we still have no federal protection from discrimination and so on. Now that visibility has been met to a certain extent, things are more complicated.

What about advertising? What is won and lost when something like Virginia Slims becomes the champion of feminism?

You've come a long way, baby. Right, commodity feminism. You're free to choose your own brand of cigarettes. *Out of my way, mister, I'm a feminist and I've got shopping to do!* It's starting to happen with homosexuality. Operating in a commercial system, sure, dissent gets commodified. What's weird is that, although the act of commodifying it is regressive, the change that it represents can be progressive. It's a mixed blessing. I'm pleased to see, for example, that segments of the gay population are used as selling tools. There's a sense of, "Great, you've made it," in the terms of the dominant culture.

You're accepted enough for people to publicly model themselves after.

That is a major change, and it comes with all sorts of complications. It creates ambivalence, and ambivalence is not pathological, it's smart. But creating political strategy around ambivalence is kind of tough.

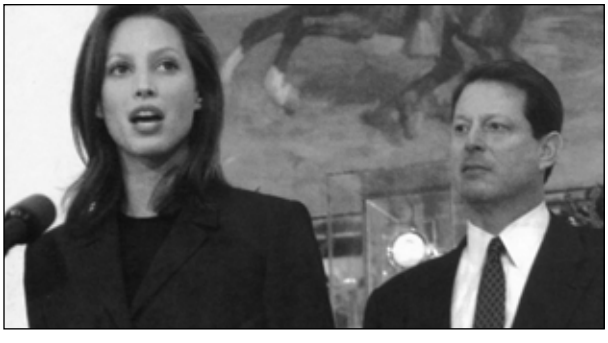
You quote Quintin Crisp saying that acceptance doesn't come through enlightenment but boredom. Do you think talk shows are more effective as boredom or enlightenment? Would you rather bore lots of people or enlighten a few?

Through TV, I'd rather bore. I can forget getting my ideas across on TV. Three seconds on *Entertainment Tonight* does not enlightenment make. There are certain spots on TV where maybe you can do that, but talk shows aren't one of them, at least not any more. TV works through repeated images, and that repetition, rather than some more complex process of cognitive transformation, is what can have a freeing effect.

Maybe repetition leads to acceptance but it's a superficial acceptance.

Well, it's not superficial for people who have been erased. Again, it's a starting point. It's not like being understood and accepted and loved, and it's no guarantee of political enfranchisement. But I think it's a mistake, which comes from privilege, to dismiss it. Your existence may be distorted, as it always is on television, but whether it's acceptance or tolerance or a superficial "Oh, hi, you're here too," at least it's not erased.

You write—I'm going to quote you now: "The public display of 'private life,' especially sexuality, is not something classy people do. It is improper. . . . It is not so much gayness that is bothersome, it's the publicness."



I'm not so sure media literacy is the answer
. . . A lot of the time media literacy gets pulled into
the service of the entertainment industries.

I'm going to play devil's advocate.

Please do.

Can't this be a defensible position? Part of this is, as you say, "This is *my* space. You do not belong here." But it's also, "Is nothing private or sacred?" Our whole culture cheapens sexuality and uses it to sell. Some straight people think they relate but really don't. And maybe they see public display and imagine their own sex life; and don't want to imagine their sex life on display. Or don't want to imagine their sex life as being the focus of their identify.

Homosexuality and gay existence comes to be a stand-in for propriety. I agree that it is more generic and not specific to gay people, that a lot of people legitimately don't want to see others touch. I just think people are often lying or wrong about what they're really objecting to. Saying you're gay in a speech act is somehow treated as a public display of sexuality. Walking down the street with a shirt that says you're a lesbian is "flaunting it." That's bullshit, and people need to be called on their double standards. Plus, I also think it's just about a lot of prudery.

Well, I'm a prude! (laughs) I mean, I don't want people knowing anything about my sex life, or even if I'm dating someone.

I'm sorta the same way, and a lot of that probably has to do with our social background, but I'd be willing to enter an honest discussion with people who feel differently.

As for the speech act—I was talking with some high school friends and that was their take. They prefer gay people who don't talk about being gay all the time.

I'm willing to not talk about it the day it's not relevant politically. And the day they stop monopolizing the conversation.

So do you see it as a temporary thing?

There will be a time—maybe a couple hundred years from now—that really is post-gay, *because of* people talking about it all the time and organizing around it. Personally, I'm not really interested in my desire being the most prominent aspect of my life, and I don't really like talking about my sexuality. But I didn't make it politically and socially relevant, and I didn't set the standards which say heterosexuality will be the only publicly acceptable version.

Back to talk shows: At your reading, you mentioned that a lot of producers have integrity and are smart, politically engaged people who don't want to exploit talk show guests. But is it really integrity if their beliefs don't effect their actions?

Well, you're right, it's not exactly integrity. It's something else. But I can't really blame them for not quitting their jobs.

If we can't expect people who we agree with politically to act on their beliefs, though, what hope is there for change?

People do need to be held accountable, certainly. But it's important to recognize the institutional confines in which actions take place. To focus on individual accountability alone is a problem. In the case of talk show producers, I'm not sure what holding individuals accountable does, since the production system is strong enough to produce conformity regardless of individual beliefs, and replace people who don't do the job. So those with integrity leave. Great.

But every situation is like that. Everyone acts within institutions.

Exactly, though some institutions leave a lot more room for people to influence them from within. And I think it's important to try and make conditions to open up room within those institutions, and to focus on the people who are ultimately accountable, who call the shots. This is something media activism is really good for: writing letters to the advertisers, CEOS, boycotts, etc. I'm not saying "Whatever you do is okay," but rather broadening the picture of accountability.

FAMOUS FOR . . .

Helping boss shred incriminating documents and looking good while testifying — Fawn Hall

Having an affair with a minor who shoots his wife in the head — Joey Buttafuocco

Cutting off husband's penis — Lorena Bobbitt

Having penis cut off — John Bobbitt

Taking a ride on the "Monkey Business" with Senator Gary Hart — Donna Rice

Bodybuilding and juicing — Jack LaLane

Living next to Larry David —Kenny Kramer

Surviving singing career by hawking psychic phone advice — Dianne Warwick

Hearing a bump on the air conditioner — Kato Kaelin

Valuing "buzz" above all else in the magazine world — Tina Brown

Becoming "Queen of amateur Web porn" after "Australian housewife" proved boring — Bernadette Taylor

Gunning down several teens with a screwdriver — Bernhard Goetz

Seducing a high school student and recruiting him to shoot her husband — Pamela Smart

Making a baby with a 14-year-old student in a class she taught — Mary Kay LeTournaeu

Fellating Hugh Grant — Divine Brown

Fellating President Clinton — Monica Lewinsky

Bashing the knee of his wife's skating competition — Jeff Gillooly

Fabricating *New Republic* articles — Stephen Glass

Watching *Rent* a lot and maybe killing a baby — Louise Woodward

Not being famous — La Toya Jackson

Claiming it is a Danish custom to leave your baby outdoors while dining in a restaurant —some Danish woman

Compiled by John Aboud

GAMSON'S SUGGESTED READINGS

Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown* (Oxford University, 1986) The best history of fame available. The pursuit of fame goes way back, Braudy demonstrates, and he traces the various narratives, strategies, technologies, and contradictions of the pursuit by the famous, the aspiring, and the admiring, from ancient Greece to contemporary Hollywood.

Danae Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism" in H. Abelove et al., eds, *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (Routledge, 1993) A complex, revealing essay demonstrating the strange relationship between consumer capitalism and identity politics—in this case lesbian identity politics. Clark analyzes "dual marketing" strategies that target gay consumers with subcultural codes that straight consumers are unlikely to notice, and traces the implications of these strategies for lesbian identity and politics.

Christine Gledhill, ed., *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (Routledge, 1991) A wide-ranging anthology of essays on the production, texts, and reception of celebrity.

P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power* (University of Minnesota, 1997) A theoretical and empirical investigation of the ideological and political dynamics of celebrity. Both a broad overview of the historical significance of stardom and a series of close case studies, this book covers such ground as the "affective power" of stars, the emergence of celebrities in different entertainment industries, and the role of celebrity in political culture.

Wayne Munson, *All Talk* (Temple University, 1993) A smart, theoretically informed analysis of television and radio talk: the talk about talk shows, the "postmodern" elements of the genre, the mix of scripting and spontaneity, and the social significance of silliness.

Michael Schudson, "Delectable Materialism: Were the Critics of Consumer Culture Wrong All Along?" *American Prospect* (Spring 1991) A brief, sharp, provocative critique of the critics of consumer culture by the author of *Advertising: The Uneasy Persuasion*. While sympathetic to the concerns of critics of materialism, Schudson argues that the satisfactions from commodities are far too easily dismissed.

Carrie's addendum: The argument about character and personality in my introductory remarks is articulated by Warren Susman in *Culture as History* (Pantheon, 1984). Daniel Boorstin writes about about the famous being known for their well-knowness in *The Image: A Guide to Psuedo-Events in America* (Harper and Row, 1961).

TEST YOUR BOOK'S O.Q.

So far, Oprah Winfrey's book club has put fourteen novels on bedside tables across the land. I read the first twelve—anyone who can convince millions of people to read not just one but two Toni Morrison novels is my hero. But I also wanted to see what her picks have in common so that when the time comes for you or I to write the Great American Novel, we'll know which heartstrings are worth tugging and which are better left alone. —*Alexandra Ringe*

1. Your protagonist's occupation is

A. Spotter at a dry cleaner (+10 points)
B. Teacher in a one-room school (+10 points)
C. Supermarket checkout clerk (+10 points)
D. Prepubescent orphan (+10 points)

2. Your story is told

A. In the first-person female (+40 points)
B. In the third person, with particular attention to female characters (+20 points)
C. In the first-person male (+10 points)
D. Any other way (-50 points).

3. Your protagonist lives in

A. A small town in the U.S. (+50 points, 20 additional points if the town is in the South or the Midwest, 10 additional points if the town is too tiny for a movie theater, a mall, or anything else to distract the characters from the abject misery of their lives)
B. A small town in WWII Germany (+5 points, but only if your main character is a dwarf)
C. A suburb of present-day Chicago (+5 points)
D. New York, LA, or any other metropolitan area (-40 points).

4. Your minor characters include

A. The town old maids who happen to be sisters (+10 points)
B. The town minister whose sole pleasure in life is food (+10 points)
C. The town hussy who gives good advice once you get beyond her tough exterior (+10 points)
D. The town malpractice attorney, the town UFO expert, or the town web designer (-20 points).

5. The bedroom activity in your book is

A. Heterosexual and pleasant (+30 points)
B. Heterosexual and abusive (+10 points)
C. Homosexual and semiconsensual at first but afterwards so disturbing to the protagonist that she pours bleach into the seducer's tank of prized angelfish (+5 points)
D. Any deviation from A, B, or C (-30 points).

6. Your protagonist is caught up in

A. A repressive political regime (-20 points)
B. A heist gone wrong (-20 points)
C. Ill feelings between neighbors (+10 points)
D. Problems at home (+50 points).

7. Your protagonist's troubles stem from

A. Alcoholism in the family (+20 points)
B. Religious zealotry in the family (+10 points)
C. Romantic involvement with a criminal (+20 points)
D. Eating large quantities of roast beef (+10 points)
E. A sickly or inadequate mother (+30 points)
F. Her own actions (-50 points).

8. Your protagonist's suffering is relieved by

A. The disappearance or demise of her drunken, unfaithful, or felonious husband, father, or paramour (+15 points, 5 more if he disappears after stabbing her mother)
B. Bonding with whales (+5 points)
C. Weaving a rug that includes the rope that her boyfriend used to commit suicide, as well as the placenta that belonged to the baby born of their union (+5 points)
D. Finding God (-20 points)
E. Plucky self-reliance and flashes of wry wisdom (+50 points).

Scoring

The Oprah Sure Thing: 200 or more points.

The Oprah Maybe (indicates a strong possibility that Oprah will take notice, especially if you won the Nobel Prize and your name is Toni): 170-199 points

The Oprah No Chance in Hell: 169 or fewer points

MY VERY SPECIAL TRIP TO THE NIKE STORE

BY DAVID CROSS

There's a little mom and pop store where I live (the quaint hamlet of Hollywood, California) that gives away free shoes. It's true! It's called the Nike Store, and they'll give you free clothing . . . well, not you, but me. Now, I've got plenty of money. I do not *need* free shoes, and hopefully never will. Still, I went to the Nike store. In fact, *I* called *them* and arranged an appointment. And it wasn't for research purposes. When it comes right down to it, I just wanted the free shit.

I was getting ready to leave L. A. for a week in the Nike-friendly township of Aspen, Colorado, for the annual Comedy and Executive Write-Off Vacation Fest. I try to participate every year because I enjoy paying twenty-five dollars for a hamburger, and listening to wealthy white people bitch about comedians. All the more reason to stock up on minimally used winter wear.

I called the nice lady (who shall remain referred to as "The Nice Lady," 'cause she was) whose sole job is to corral a seemingly never-ending stream of real-life, honest-to-gosh celebrities through the maze of logo-embossed Nike swag. I told her who I was, and what I did. It turned out that I had the potential to show up on a television set occasionally. And that, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, is the only criteria for getting free clothing and accessories, hand-spun by the gnarled, malnourished, immature hands of children unfortunate enough to be born into a poverty-stricken country whose government's ethics jibe perfectly with our government's. But I digress.

For some reason, it's located in an industrial park near the airport, but there's good soul food nearby, so there. Anyway, to make the experience of getting free clothing even more enjoyable, the store is designed to resemble the interior of a fancy-pants professional basketball arena, albeit one filled with jock-wear. The playful quality of the store seemed to wash any misgivings I had down the Nike drain, and straight into hell where they will remain.

I was escorted (or es-"courted", ha-ha!) around the showroom by the nice lady. She walked around pointing out various shoes here, or a sweatshirt there, and would say, "This is nice. What about this?" My response became limited to a few "yeah"'s, or "sure"'s, all the while stocking up for the impending race war with enough Nike clothing to keep myself in black market-bartered fresh water and ammo to last until the New Republic Of Unimerica was recognized by the "Jew World Order."

I turned down very little that was offered. I remember being suddenly honest when presented with a couple of turtlenecks with the Nike Swoosh prominently displayed on the turtle of the neck part. "I wouldn't ever wear those, no thanks. . . . Oh, okay." I got the feeling that not too many people turned stuff down. Would Shaq have taken them? That's for me to know and you to find out. Although I don't know, but if you find out, please keep me informed. (Note to self: Call Shaquille O'Neal — ask about Nike turtleneck.) Well, the end result of all of this was not only walking out of there with a new friend, someone that I will forever more refer to as a "nice lady," but with bags of clothing that, as of this day, are scattered about the United States in various Goodwills, ex-girlfriends closets, and on the feet of several *Mr. Show* staffers. So remember, next time you see newly arrived immigrants, eyes wide open, fearful and intimidated by our great Marketplace, look down at their feet. Are they wearing a fancy pair of high-tech sneakers? They are? Oh, those are from the Nike store. I gave them away.

David Cross, who can be seen in such features as The Amelia Earhart Story, The Slugger's Wife, *and* Destiny Rides Again, *is the bald, Jewish one on HBO's* Mr. Show.

We'd rather wear logos than go naked.

Yo La Tengo

Fortunately, there are other options.

close to the machine

interview with ellen ullman ■ by amy wan

As a programmer, writer, technology commentator for National Public Radio, and consultant, Ullman uses her experiences to show the many contradictions that can arise from technology. In *Close to the Machine: Technophilia and Its Discontents* (City Lights), Ullman discusses how technology has affected not only the workplace but the work*space*. What happens when our workplaces and communities become mediated more and more by computers, email, cell phones, and beepers? *Close to the Machine* is chock full of anecdotes that explore the intersections between humanity and technology. Her conscience and memories of work experiences create a memoir that works as a critique of technology but also as evidence of her love for it. Her struggles resonate with anyone who has wondered about the impact technology has had on how we see each other. —Amy Wan

Stay Free!: As a programmer, how did you get into writing?

Ellen Ullman: I've always written. I'm from an older generation of programmers. For the most part, we did not come out of engineering (which was a much later development). When business computing was exploding in the late '70s, the need for programmers far outstripped the supply of engineers so all sorts of people were drawn in from the social sciences and humanities. Whenever there's a new profession, this occurs—like there weren't certified web designers at first. People come to it from different areas. In the next round, people who have studied web design in school will do it. And I think that's a different kind of person.

A lot of my peers just sort of fell into web design. Liberal arts programs are under pressure to help students specialize and develop marketable skills.

Exactly. It's unfortunate that universities focus so much on making it a discipline because whatever skills you learn will very soon become obsolete. So the most valuable thing is to learn how to teach yourself.

How do you do stay motivated? I work at a record label and there's that same feeling of constantly trying to keep up with younger people. And I'm 26.

My god. We're going to have three year olds running the world next we know.

(laughs) Well, this is a particularly youth-oriented industry.

So is computing, so there's the sense of the younger person who's got a lot of drive, but has very little patience for the older technology, of its wisdom. When I started out in programming, I remember taking an interface manual with me when I went to pick up my sweetie from the airport once. . . .There are appropriate moments to be engaged in something and to let that take you over. The problem is if you don't come out of it. I've worked with programmers who will just plug away and I'll say, "no, I will not let you work on this anymore, you're just making more bugs." It's very easy to lose the sense that you're just getting obsessed and not necessarily inspired.

You talk about this in your book. You don't think about the consequences of what you're doing or what the larger project is.

We're not computers—if you keep us running day in and day out, we won't crank away and solve a detractable problem. It disturbs me very much this whole work ethos that started in technology is spreading outward into other professions, this sort of driven, sort of work-driven life.

Bosses expect that.

Yes, that's always been true. But it's even become cool to work ninety hours a week. When I was coming up, that was the most staid, reactionary, bourgeois, boring way to spend your life.

It's "I worked until 10" and then "oh really, I worked until midnight"!

Exactly—competitive late night working.

How did that happen?

That is a really good question. That is THE question, I think. I think it has to do with the privatization of pleasure and security, the knowledge that you're never really going to get social security, that Medicare won't last, the notion of the public space having disintegrated. Aside from the workplace, we don't have many social structures left.

Do you create your boundaries between life and work? With cell phones, beepers, and laptops, you can be reached for work at any time.

I don't carry a beeper and usually keep my cell phone off. For the most part, I know very few people who really need those things.

Having them is like working long hours. If you have these things, you're really into your job. Having your cell phone ring while at dinner is a status symbol.

You think so?

I don't, but I think people feel like "I'm being so bothered when I'm trying to eat but I'm so important because someone needs to speak with me so urgently."

Every person is a mogul.

Two instances in your book come to mind regarding morality—the boss who used technology to monitor his devoted receptionist and your work with the system that catalogued AIDS patients. You seemed to imply the necessity of pushing moral qualms aside.

All work requires moral compromises. What makes the issue more acute in technology is the breadth of effect a system can have. It's one thing if you disagree with your boss's handling of one particular customer, for example. But when you build a computer system, you are changing the way *every* customer is handled.

You write that the "computer is not really like us. It is a projection of a very slim part of ourselves; that portion devoted to logic, order, rule and clarity." Do you think working with computers encourages people to think of themselves as machines? What are some other dangers of identifying so strongly with machines and computers?

We have a dialectical relationship with our machines: We create systems and they recreate us. We create computers first as complements to ourselves, to do the tasks we're not particularly good at, things involving precision: long calculations, for example, and simple, repetitive tasks. All this is fine when we are using, say, a calculator. But as computers become ubiquitous, we find ourselves surrounded with these things based on precision. So more and more of the things we need to accomplish are tasks defined by computers more rigidly than we as humans would define them for ourselves. We are forced to become more precise in our actions to satisfy the needs of our own systems, which we built initially as helpers
and which eventually gain a kind of power over us.

The people who hired you to create the AIDS database seemed to believe that any data is good if it's possible to know it. Are there certain types of knowledge that we just shouldn't know?

We have eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge. I don't see us ever putting the apple back on the tree. The enormous difficulty is what to do with the knowledge once you have it. In the Jewish daily service, we thank G-d every day for "the gift of intelligence." Maybe we need to see our intelligence as a gift, not a right or a destiny.

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virtually bearable

Jason Torshinsky Survives the Transarchitecture Symposium

Sensing that I was clamped between the elevator doors and attempting to join her, the woman sighed and pressed the "door open" button. Our common destination: the "Transarchitectures: Visions of Digital Communities" symposium at Getty Center in Los Angeles.

I was attending the symposium as the last-minute replacement of a *Wired* writer, which made me a great deal more interesting to those running the show. I gave my name at the check-in table, and was asked if there was "only one of me." I was pretty sure I was all the me's I brought. So they gave me a postcard and some stapled pages to explain exactly what this symposium was about. I found one clue on the website:

The term 'transarchitecture' has been adopted as one possible way to begin thinking about the construction of hybrid —physical and virtual— spaces. Conceptualization and design of digital spaces draws on numerous strands of thinking in the arts and sciences, yet transforms these ideas just as the digital manipulates the analog in new and important ways.

So, based on this, I had no idea whether this was going to be all bullshit or not.

The Getty's auditoriums are very refined and comfortable. The rows of seats are designed so that you don't need to stand up when someone wants to get by. Also, if you put your feet up on the back of the seat in front of you, one of the ushers will make you put them down. This is about the extent of what I learned from the introductory speeches.

Well, no, I also heard the word "cyberspace" bandied about a great deal, as well as "community" and "space." Oh, and the name of the keynote speaker, Bill Mitchell.

Bill Mitchell has more degrees than a thermometer and is, among other things, the Dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at MIT. He has written several books about architecture and its relation to our digital age. On top of all this, he has a remarkably stereotypical pedantic-sounding British/Boston accent, one very similar to the professor in Rodney Dangerfield's *Back to School*.

Mitchell started by discussing how cities are defined by their network systems: Venice and its canals, London and its subways, Los Angeles by its highways, etc. He continued with a roundabout and remarkably detailed explanation of the types of human communication, dividing them up into synchronous and asynchronous categories. Synchronous communication refers to things that happen in real time, like talking face-to-face. Asynchronous communication is, of course, communication that does not happen in real time, like a letter, or email, or anything where the sender has to wait for a response. Semaphore flags may even fit into this category. Get it? It took the good doctor at least twenty minutes to explain.

Dr. Mitchell then postulated that the vast quantity of email was actually a hybrid form of communication, with asynchronous communication requesting synchronous. You know, like when you email a friend to meet for lunch. This would be a pretty radical idea, if only it had not been around for centuries. This idea isn't new, and, perhaps more importantly, it's not terribly interesting, either.

At this point in the lecture, I'm getting a bit restless, and starting to wonder what would happen if I start writing personal notes to the woman in the row in front of me.

What finally forced my attention back to the podium was a staggeringly detailed description of how to use a bookstore. To quote: "Physically entering the bookstore, literally taking a book off the shelf with your hand, and actually taking it from the store."

Thanks for clearing that up, Dr. Mitchell. The point of his lengthy description—the gist of which can be gathered from the name of the "Pic 'n' Pay" shoestore chain—was to compare this process with purchasing a book from Amazon.com.

Mitchell's groundbreaking point was the revelation that Amazon.com represents a new kind of "hybrid architectural space," one birthed as a result of our digital age: "Virtual front, real back." That is to say the front of the bookstore is actually a website, not a building. So they also have a real, physical warehouse to store all those copies of *The Rules* and *Sailing for Dummies*.

As Dr. Mitchell smugly espoused his "virtual front, real back" concept, it occurred to me that once again his point would have been more effective if it had been made 200 years ago. Isn't this new hybrid space the same thing

as what a Sears & Roebuck catalog accomplished in 1850? (Although, granted, online front ends are perhaps faster and contain many more animated gifs.)

I suppose I really needn't go on, detailing his every point, but, because I had to sit though it, I'm tempted to make you hear it all, too.

The keynote speech finally ground to a halt, to a great deal of applause. As I received another dirty look for having my foot on a seatback, the next speaker was introduced.

Red Burns, the chair of Interactive communication at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, was notable for her interaction with the crowd. They turned on her. She lamented the superficial nature of most online chat, blaming it on the heavy participation by the "younger generation" (to which someone in the crowd yelped a dorky "hear hear"). Then, as she was discussing her disappointment with the lack of "community building" online, she brought up VRML chat areas.

Virtual Reality Modeling Language is what VRML means, as in "kind of crappy 3D rendered environments." Cumbersome and inefficient, they don't really add anything to the normal chatroom experience save for crude interminglings of little animated avatars.

Chair Burns said basically just that to the crowd, and boy, did they turn ugly, branding her as some sort of Luddite that rejected all technology past 1994.

What are these virtual communities that everyone was defending and for which the speakers were searching? Why is everyone sure they're not around? And why is that so terrible? To hear the speakers, you would think the single most important function of the Web is creating utopic communities. But other than complaining that they weren't here yet and hoping they'd get here soon, rarely did it ever get beyond that.

Ms. Burns disparaged the common interest groups that appear all over the net as being too specific, leaving observers feeling like outsiders. Of all the speakers and panelists discussing virtual communities, not one brought up the idea that just maybe these common interest groups are actually the sorts of communities the net is going to spawn. It's really the only kind that makes sense. The kind of electronic neighborhood that so many were loosely describing has no reason to exist; that type of community is based on a decidedly nonvirtual factor: location. Being virtual takes away physical constraints and lets people pursue their interests with impunity. Like it or not, the groups the net has fostered are of Doom players, Volkswagen owners, cat fanciers, and pedophiles. Insisting that online groups be otherwise is like trying to scult marble with udon noodles.

I normally have a pretty high tolerance for academic speculation, but what was going on was really just, as they say, mental masturbation. And not even very good masturbation at that. In the end, I had no idea what transarchitecture was or why it even mattered. And I don't think anyone there did, either. An example of the general attitude: Someone in the crowd told the panel that they felt it was a bit "obvious" to have this symposium at the Getty's lecture hall; it would have been better to have it at some warehouse. I suppose it is a bit obvious to have a symposium at a place where people can sit and hear other people speak. How painfully straightforward and workable. What a ninny.

An interesting postscript: for weeks afterward, representatives from the Getty would call almost every day to try to find out what I was going to write for *Wired*. It was like having an insecure friend who calls all the time for approval. It was creepy. But I promised them a glowing review.

So let's hear it for Transarchitecture!

did somebody say, "community?"

Leslie Savan on "Community" Disservice

"In the polling community," Republican pollster Tony Fabrizio said during the '96 elections. "We have a saying: The trend is your friend." And the friendliest trend rolling through speech patterns today is the discovery of "communities" where previously there were only interests or professions. Places like Fabrizio's imaginary Pollstertown now dot the map of America, as any group of more than two individuals consecrates itself as a community.

"It's time to get UFO investigations out of the UFO community," a true believer asserted on a Fox TV show about (Twentieth Century Fox's) *Independence Day*. According to the *Dallas Morning News*, "the stock-car racing community wrapped its arms around car owner Rick Hendrick" at NASCAR's annual awards banquet (he was recently indicted on federal charges). An Emmy Award winner thanked "all of you in the television community out there." One member of that community, Peter Jennings, described Christopher Reeve at the Democratic National Convention as an icon of "the paralyzed community."

Real communities in the traditional sense may be struggling to survive, but *community*, the word, is booming, cheerfully riding any modifier that waddles its way, as in these recent sightings: "the eco-design community," "the S&M community," "the creative community," "the transplant community," "the hockey community," "the legal community," "the criminal community," and, from the nonplace where this kind of thinking seems to be the default drive, "the online community," "the networked community," and "the virtual community."

Clearly, the Internet has popularized the idea of nonphysical communities, pushing cup-of-sugar-borrowing, town-meeting-decision-making neighborhoods to the definition. And our president's it-takes-a-village touchy-feeliness has raised expectations of group coziness so much that it takes a community to have a conversation. But there's a more fundamental emotional shift in the meaning of the word as well, away from describing an inclusive, indiscriminate mix of people (the sort of community served by the United Way) to something more about personal choice. As a Sausalito interior designer told the design monthly *Metropolis* (which devoted its November issue to answering "What is community?"): "The communities that have some importance to me are communities of intellect or spirit. They are the design community, the artistic community, the psychologically aware community, the health-conscious community, the nonviolent community, the ecologically sound community."

If this busy guy ever gets to New York, he's got to check out a new Chelsea restaurant—it's called Community.

Almost everybody who isn't a member of the misanthropic community seems to be overselled on the sweets of togetherness. But most of the world's users tend to fall into three, uh, categories: First, minorities, like gays, blacks, and Jews, who may or may not have a cohesive group identity but who, by virtue of their contrast to the majority, have the most natural claim to being at least a community in name. Second, people who share an interest or occupation ("the advertising community," "the cultural community") who aren't a community by the usual standards but apparently feel girded by the label. And finally, anyone who wants to invoke some form of social consensus, no matter how imaginary. (As Elaine does in a *Seinfeld* episode: Worried what people will think if they discover she dumped a man after he had a stroke, she frets, "I'll be ostracized by the community!" Jerry: "Community? There's a community? All this time, I've been living in a community. I had no idea.")

Identity politics has surely contributed to *community*'s rise, and the word, with its emphasis on collective rather than individual virtue, does serve as a righteous liberal retort to the right's *family values*. But *community* isn't limited to a specific p.c. left. "When *Firing Line* began," William F. Buckley, Jr., said on radio last week, "conservatives were a very isolated community." And of course, *community* is unfettered capitalism's favorite humanizing device: the business community, the investment community, and the financial community, and the financial community are among the worst abusers.

Like so many values, *community* is on everyone's lips just as it seems to be disappearing. The enormous social upheavals of the past few generations—globalization, suburbanization, television technologies that collapse times and space—have all forced the

notion of community to shift from one grounded in a physical closeness that fostered mutual concerns and responsibilities to . . . what?

"My definition of community has two components," says Amitai Etzoni, the "guru" of communitarianism, the movement that focuses on balancing rights and responsibilities among individuals and groups, which President Clinton made famous during his 1992 campaign. (Etzioni acknowledges *community*'s overuse: "We've not only noticed it, but we're the culprits.") "The first element," he says, "is a bonding, not one on one, but a group of people to each other. The second is a shared set of values and culture—it's much more than interests."

He doesn't find all self-named communities spurious: "Bankers may not be a strong community, but they are more than an interest group—they often know each other personally, they hang around the same country club. But people who have only a narrowly defined group interest—people who sell office equipment and lobby Congress, for example, when they share no bond, just shared greed—they're not community."

Robert Putnam, the Harvard government professor who wrote "Bowling Alone," an essay on the decline of civic participation in America, says he's "ambivalent to the word *community*. The word has become so vague and banal and meaningless, I try to use another term—*social capital*, which means social networks of connectedness, of reciprocity and trust. But if I say 'social capital' before a group of Rotarians, their eyes glaze over." The old community cornerstones, "the PTA, bowling leagues, Sunday schools," Putnam says, "no longer fit the way we live . . . but as a people, we don't seem to want to give up this word for something we long for—as sense of warm, cuddly connectedness to people with whom we share things in common."

And as boomers face their mortality, "we're going to hear a lot more about community," he adds. "In a certain sense, there's a market out there for people who have ideas on how to connect." The success of the Saturn car company, for instance, is due largely to its decision to market community, complete with "reunions" for Saturn owners—who, of course, have never previously met.

But why can't the damn word at least be slowed down, maybe by substituting other nouns that used to work well enough and that, depending on the context, can actually be more descriptive: network, industry, circle, field, movement, association, public, constituency? In fact, why not go for broke and state the entity—investors, artists, scientists—without any appendage? Obviously, *community* softens and bestows respect on racial and ethnic words that, standing alone, could too easily be turned into slurs. On the other hand, *community* makes it awfully easy to feign a respect that isn't there (an exercise common on TV and radio talk shows).

The reason everyone wants to be a part of a community, rather than an association or a movement, goes beyond respect: The bright and rounded word lends an instant halo effect. Anything it touches seems valiant; whatever the endeavor, it is noble.

Whether community is vanishing or merely evolving, fear of its loss is what keeps us chanting the word. The word provides comfort—it's a prayer or wishful thinking, as if we could yak it into being.

Community's quasireligious overtones may reflect an authentic yearning, but too often we're reaching less for spiritual kin than self-amplification: we want to see our individual selves turned into a multitude—a thousand other people who cherish *The X-Files*, do eco-design, or make a killing in online investments. We're not alone; our identity is validated.

But since community is generally a good thing, why niggle over how the word is used? Sometimes magical thinking really works. Writer Robert Atkins recently edited an issue on community for the online journal *TalkBack!* He began by zinging those who "prattle about

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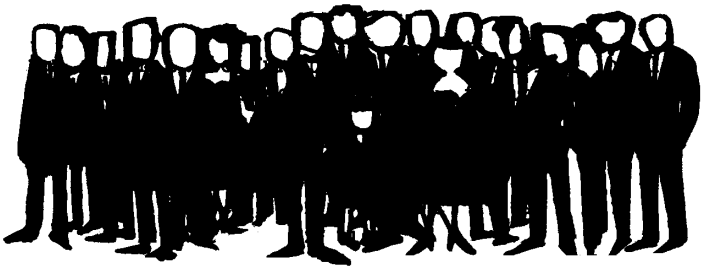

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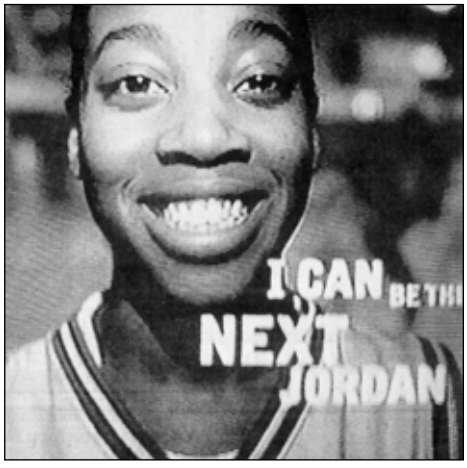

Days before Nike's new commercials aired, they were already playing on TV. NEWSFLASH: "New Nike Slogan I CAN to Trump JUST DO IT." "Sources Say I CAN a Return to Focus on Positive."

Brilliant. Nike as the Little Engine That Could. Ad agency Wieden & Kennedy does it again—lifting a catchphrase ("Do it!" was a Yippies battle cry in the '60s) and repositioning it. Talking heads may wonder, "Will I CAN be the next JUST DO IT?" but the real news is that it already is:

"Ever Talk Face to Face from a Hundred Miles Away? You Can."—Intel.

"Betcha Can!"—Merit cigarettes.

"I Think I Can."—IBM.

"Yes, I can!"—Pringles Fat Free.

"Why Do We Apply Mascara at 55 mph? Because We Can."—Virginia Slims.

"Why Fly Norwich, NY? Because You Can!"—Norwich Weather.

"Create Your Own Series of Dodge Ball Trading Cards. Because You Can." —Sony Electronics.

"Can" and "do" work so well in unison, it seems, that "can" has become its own reason for doing. Why do something? Because you can. Or as the T-shirts and bumper stickers put it, "Why does a dog lick his balls? Because he can." Why does Crazed Biology Man on *X-Files* make giant spider legs grow out of eyes? "Because I can." Why does evil Chad from *In the Company of Men* fuck over everyone possible? "Because I could." When there's no good reason, a nonreason will do. Capability equals justification.

That advertisers could turn this into an incentive to buy comes as somewhat of a shock at first. Surely Sony and the gang aren't limiting themselves to targeting evil, ball-licking bastards. (At the very least, it's a pretty safe bet that someone who relies on "because I can" would not make a good cop or babysitter.) And while Madison Avenue likes to frame questions, asking "why?" opens up a whole bag of worms. "*Why* create your own series of dodge ball trading cards?" Stupidity? Boredom? Got no friends? As an answer, "because you can" has plenty of competition; there is no shortage of bad reasons.

In part, that is precisely the point. Advertisers are fessing up with a familiar ironic wink, something akin to saying, "If I'm going to be an asshole, I can at least be a rich asshole. Har, har." Yet the "because I can" of ad slogans is oft as earnest as it is ironic. The phrase has been bandied about so many times that it's been transformed

from a cheap punchline substituting for a reason to a buzzphrase for choice, freedom, possibility, power.

Of course, whether we need or even want to apply mascara at 55 mph is another question entirely, one advertisers can't afford to raise. Better to steer away from anything that might provoke thinking. Don't think, just do it. As a 1993 Coca-Cola campaign put it, "Some people live their life as an exclamation, not an explanation." In that fraction of a second it takes you to decide between the Friction Free Grip or the Easy Pour Spout, millions are at stake.

In fact, the only need involved is the advertisers', who need to sell you not only more than you need, but now also more than you want: "Just buy this because you can." What's a little "anal leakage" and bloating when you can eat a whole bag of fat-free chips? Assuming, of course, that you have the money for all this stuff. Like "Just Do It," "because you can" assumes the audience has privilege, money, and ability in the first place. To someone struggling to pay rent and put food on the table, "because you can" and "just do it" would rightly sound like a cruel joke. The ads aren't directed to those people, though. They're for middle-class managers, teens, and soccer moms. It's as if advertisers are picking out those who've reached the top part of the hierarchy of needs (past physical and material and up toward emotional ones) and asking them to step back down.

"Because I can," then, caters to our desire for self-actualization at the same time it denies it. Any ten year old knows the proper response to "because I can": "So?"

Yes, you can buy 100 brands of deodorant, yes, you can throw yourself off a cliff, but that doesn't mean you *should*. And therein lies the kicker: the only "should" "because I can" accommodates is the silent "should" the phrase itself implies. "Because I can" symbolizes freedom of choice and possibility (as the Levi's campaign says, "it's wide open") while choking it. To wit:

"Why are you buying a gold watch?"

"Because I can."

"Well, why aren't you buying a silver watch? And why don't you buy *me* a watch? You can do that, too."

In other words, to do something because you can hides the fact that choice, however retarded it may be, *needs* "should."

"Should" has gotten a bad rep lately. "Should" isn't the path to purchase; it's the path away, the barrier between buyer and product. "Should" is restraint, abstinence, gray areas. "Should" is the anti-"can," Bob Dole's "Just Don't Do It." But "should" is where true choice and power lie; "should" is what separates us from chimps. Intel processors and Sony digital cameras have no sense of "should."

Naturally, "should" has its own ad campaign, playing the bad guy in PepsiCo's Josta commercials. In one spot, an old man confides to a teen that he wasted his youth on "shoulda coulda woulda" when he coulda been out drinking and chasing women. "Shoulda coulda woulda . . . better do the good stuff," the tag line advises, the good stuff being rebellion and Josta.

The message isn't lost on a couple of Josta's biggest fans. Azure Reznor, a 17 year old in Virginia, has undertaken a consumer campaign to "save Josta." PepsiCo hasn't necessarily indicated that there's anything to save—so why all the effort?

"I remember Crystal Pepsi and how PepsiCo took it off the market," says Reznor. "I'm not letting that happen to Josta. I'm *doing* something."

Meanwhile, John Blaylock, a psychology graduate at Oklahoma State, has organized a Josta-themed scavenger hunt for his residence hall, edited movies and TV pictures to include Josta, and made a Josta clock and Web site, among other projects, as a tribute to the drink.

Via e-mail, I asked him what he thinks of the commercials. "Damn cool," writes Blaylock, then explains, "If your conscience gets in the way most of the time, take the steel rod out of your ass and live a little. I mean, if you feel like dancing in class, do it, or if you feel like yelling in the middle of Wal-Mart, just do it."

Why? Because you can.

"Can" is why we have technology to clone humans, why socially conscious software programmers end up creating technologies that invade privacy. We do what we're good at. We create. And we do what we want.

Several months ago, I got into an e-mail debate with a sales rep at an online intelligence engine (my day job involves buying advertising for a record company). I asked him why we need to "automate the word-of-mouth process." Why have robots recommend music? Why take a fun, interesting process—talking to people, record hunting, reading zines—and hand it over to machines? Mr. Sales Rep agreed, "It's not that people need this. We're just providing another option."

Because we can.

Don't worry about the consequences, just do it. Remember AT&T's campaign from 1994? One ad read, "Ever tuck your baby in from the airport? You will." Another: "Ever send a fax from the beach? You will."

Should you tuck your baby in from the airport? Ever want to send a fax from the beach? These questions are irrelevant. Technology is inevitable. Only a chump would resist. And so it is with the market—essentially a machine—where the only "should" that matters is the buy-and-sell. "Because I can" is the mantra for a society that has so internalized the mechanisms of the market that we see ourselves as little machines. Capability equals justification equals destiny. If you can, you will. For some reason, when I think of "choice" and "possibility" and "freedom," this isn't what I have in mind. *—CM*

Originally published 1/20/98. Shortly after Nike's campaign began, Champion Products—which had run its own "I can" ads and trademarked "You know you can" in Canada—filed suit against Nike for using the phrase. Funny.

Shopping Spies

Why is that man staring at me?

Andy Greenfield, president of Greenfield Marketing Consultants, is setting the scene for me:

"You're standing at the salad bar, Carrie, so I sidle up next to you. You're looking at the chicken and broccoli, then you look on, and I mumble something like, 'Gee, I was thinking of having that chicken and broccoli,' and you say something like, 'Look, that broccoli is kinda wilted.' Then we sorta go along and I see you dip the ladle into the macaroni and cheese and I say, 'Gee, what's the story with that?' You might say, 'Man, I love the cheese. It looks fresh and hot and steeeeamy . . .' "

Andy sounds like he's salivating. For a second, I feel like the star of my own commercial. An unappetizing, dreamlike, and (thank god) transient moment where roles are reversed: I'm not the audience—the marketing guy is.

This is how Andy conducts his business: buddying up to people in public and secretly tapping their unconscious. Greenfield has coined a term for his research—studying "naked behavior." "In an ideal world, I'd actually be in your head," says Greenfield, "and I'd understand that what Carrie is looking for in a deodorant is something a little bigger with a better grip on it." He continues, "What we're doing is enabling manufacturers to better meet the real needs of the consumer."

Funny how such a studied observer of consumer behavior could overlook a pretty basic truth—any company spending that much money, time, and energy on my psyche must not have a product worth buying. That is, my so-called needs only bear such intense scrutiny when the differences between deodorants don't matter. The products may all be more or less the same, Greenfield might as well say, but people still aren't!

Other marketers call studying naked behavior "ethnography" or "anthropological studies"—studying consumers in their "natural" environments (shopping malls, fast-food joints, video shops, department stores, homes). Regardless of the term, the work is part of the ever-burgeoning field of qualitative research. With qualitative research, the consumer isn't just a number, she's a complex set of attitudes, lifestyle preferences, and values.

The primary tools of qualitative research have typically been in-depth, one-on-one, and group interviews (focus groups). Trouble is, the tools aren't working. For one thing, humans overreport good behavior and underreport bad. Moms will say they give Junior fruit and whole wheat for lunch when they actually dole out Doritos. Often interviewees don't even realize they're lying. Outside of focus groups, these issues aren't things they think about much. And that's another problem: focus groups measure conscious rather than the decisive unconscious responses.

Further complicating matters, people have grown familiar with the concept of focus groups, so they try to anticipate marketing strategies. Interviewees are made conscious not only of buying decisions but of the marketers' consciousness of their consciousness. Which, for a marketer, sucks. As they say in the biz, "focus groups are not the real world." (In the real world, marketers follow people around with notepads, tape recorders, and video cameras.)

Paco Underhill is, like Greenfield, a market

researcher who thinks "out of the box" (in this case, "under the table"). Underhill's company, Envirosell, uses hidden video cameras to study shopping behavior. To pick up subtleties, undercover researchers trail individual customers, taking note of facial expressions and nuances. Later, a second researcher will approach the customers and ask them for a brief interview. Do these shoppers ever catch on?

"If a person has any indication they are upsetting someone, they are simply to turn around and walk away," says Underhill.

In other words, yes, but, he assures me, "Our intention is not to disturb people."

Naturally, Envirosell doesn't want to disturb people. The goal is to conduct research without subjects even noticing. Telemarketers and annoying mall surveyors are bad news, says Underhill; their jarring, invasive approach is downright disrespectful.

But what's worse, they're not very effective. In the same way a bad actor makes the audience notice the acting, a bad marketer calls attention to the process. "Ideally," says Greenfield, "you want the technique to be transparent."

Although media attention hasn't exactly kept them invisible, a burgeoning breed of "cool hunters" operate under similar principles. These marketers don't just study the cool kids, they hang out, videotape, and parrot the cool kids. In their book, *Street Trends: How Today's Alternative Youth Cultures Are Creating Tomorrow's Mainstream Markets*, consultants Janine Lopiano-Misdom and Joanne De Luca seem determined to erase the boundaries between researcher and researchee. At times, it's difficult to tell whether they're writing about youth culture or marketing:

"The new modernity is all about unity, the coming together in a collective thinking, a collective unity of street cultures to better their situation, seize control of their future, bringing all the creative and progressive heads together to form one collective vibe."

Misdom and De Luca are hardly alone. Record companies such as BMG, Sony, and Virgin sponsor inner-city word-of-mouth, enlisting cool urban kids as de facto publicists who work in "street teams." Experimental qualitative research is becoming de rigueur among corporations targeting youth, who are considered to be too cynical and too media savvy (or numb) to be reached by any other means.

But according to Underhill, consumer resistance varies not so much by age as by region and zip code. The educated and wealthy are less willing to, say, speak to a researcher. "Whereas if I stop someone in a blue-collar city in the South to talk about beer, they're delighted," says Underhill.

The purchasing power of blue-collar workers is limited, however. Therein lies a catch-22: The people marketers most want to reach—the culturally influential and wealthy—are the hardest to reach.

In a way, marketers are their own worst enemy. The more a technique—be it survey, focus group, or promotion—is used, the less effective it becomes. The most desirable consumers have had so many marketers vying for their attention, they've adjusted their behavior accordingly. They're less likely to talk to telemarketers or in-store researchers, fill out surveys, or give out personal data. Call it consumer revenge or savvy or cynicism, but that response helps drive a perpetual tug-of-war between buyer and seller. The more strategies marketers try, the more they need to try.

But consumer revenge has a side effect—adapting means tuning out. People avoid certain aisles in the grocery store when the kids come along, zap television commercials, screen phone calls in the dinner hours when telemarketers are likely to call.

But what happens when those boundaries of time and place are erased? When anyone, anywhere, at any time could be studying you to make a buck? When consumer savvy means mistrusting everyone?

Underhill has an "ethical problem with practices that invade privacy."

"I could call someone up right now and get your bank and credit balance, your driving record, grades in school, and almost no one is addressing that," he says. Envirosell isn't the problem. "[Our] image of Big Brother has given us an excuse to look at what is overt in our culture rather than what is truly covert."

Call it an unintended benefit of the perpetual tug-of-war: marketers can always count on a bigger bad guy. Although in this case, Underhill must've missed the *Time* cover story, multiple *New York Times* reports, and just about the bulk of privacy scaremongering that suggest his concepts of "overt" and "covert" are upside down. While discussion of privacy issues focuses almost entirely on isolated personal intrusions—Kitty's boss reads her e-mail, John's bank account gets hacked—institutionalized, "unobtrusive" research by the likes of Underhill and Greenfield slips by under the cloak of anonymity. These people don't necessarily need your name or address (at least not for now; not until their techniques become the new standard and it's time to push further), they just need your brain. And since focus groups aren't the real world, they're working damn hard to make the real world a focus group.
—Carrie McLaren

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virtual community as if sex-chat rooms . . . constitute community." But looking back on the project, he now says he "can see the value of adhering to some ideas even if we don't quite believe in them, like Santa. Maybe the fact we say 'community' all the time is an important wake-up call that it's an endangered phenomenon."

Maybe. But if past habits are any clue, we're far more likely to continue to choose a verbal hologram over the real thing. Who wants to *do* anything if you can merely say it? You don't have to join local organizations, do volunteer work, or even vote because you're already part of the creative community, the Channel 13 community, or—who knows?—the polling community.

You've done your duty by pronouncing the word.

This article originally appeared in New York, *January 27, 1997.*

InFlight with Victor Ancale

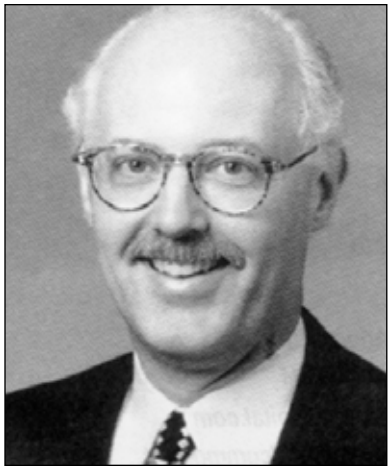
Author of *Relentless Growth: How Cancer Cells' Success Strategies Can Work for You and Your Business*

InFlight recently sat down with Victor Ancale, author of the runaway bestseller *Relentless Growth: How Cancer Cells' Success Strategies Can Work for You and Your Business* (Addison-Wesley).

InFlight: You've had an exciting year. What has been the most satisfying element of your success?
Ancale: The most satisfying thing, no question, has been the personal relationships I've developed with the CEOs of some of our largest corporations: General Motors, Disney, RJR Nabisco. They realize that their revenues can double, even triple, if they apply my Principle of the Three M's: Mutate, Metabolize, and Metastasize.

InFlight: Tell us about how you first discovered the Three M's.
Ancale: Well, as many people know, I first became interested in cellular biology after the loss of Barney, my German shepherd. I wondered: what exactly is this "cancer" that can knock out an animal as strong and loving as Barney? So I did a little reading in *Scientific American* and it hit me. The average, everyday cells inside Barney—or in you and me—exist in a kind of stasis. But cancer cells aren't stuck in that kind of stale Second Wave thinking. They believe in their nucleii, that they can divide and grow virtually without limit. That's the kind of spirit that's been missing from American business! So I spent the next four months learning everything I could about how cancer cells achieve that kind of growth, and how to apply those lessons to today's economic climate.

InFlight: Give us an example of the Three M's in practice.
Ancale: Kentucky Fried Chicken is now the primary vendor in 88 percent of the public high school cafeterias in America. Two years ago, they didn't even dream of touching the schools market. Their CEO brought me in for the seminar, and they started having daily Mutation Meditation sessions. Each person testifies about whether he or she has been acting and thinking like a proto-oncogene—those are the genes that encourage constant growth—or like a stand-pat, rest-on-our-laurels tumor-suppressor gene. Sometimes these confessions are very moving.



Most of KFC's management then started working ninety, a hundred hours a week, and they demanded the same commitment from their cooking staff at the franchise level. You know, in normal cells there's a protein called pRB that puts the brakes on growth and reproduction. But cancer cells have special cyclin-kinase proteins that say: "What limits? Just go for it!" That's what I call efficient metabolism.

InFlight: It seems like a miracle that American business ever survived before this book.
Ancale: Oh, no, no, I can't take that kind of credit. I'm just helping business leaders find new words for what they've always known. This stuff is deep, deep in the American grain. You know, one of the great proto-oncogene leaders in history was Theodore Roosevelt. Where

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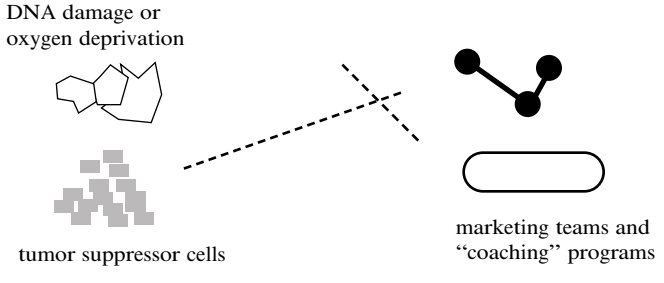
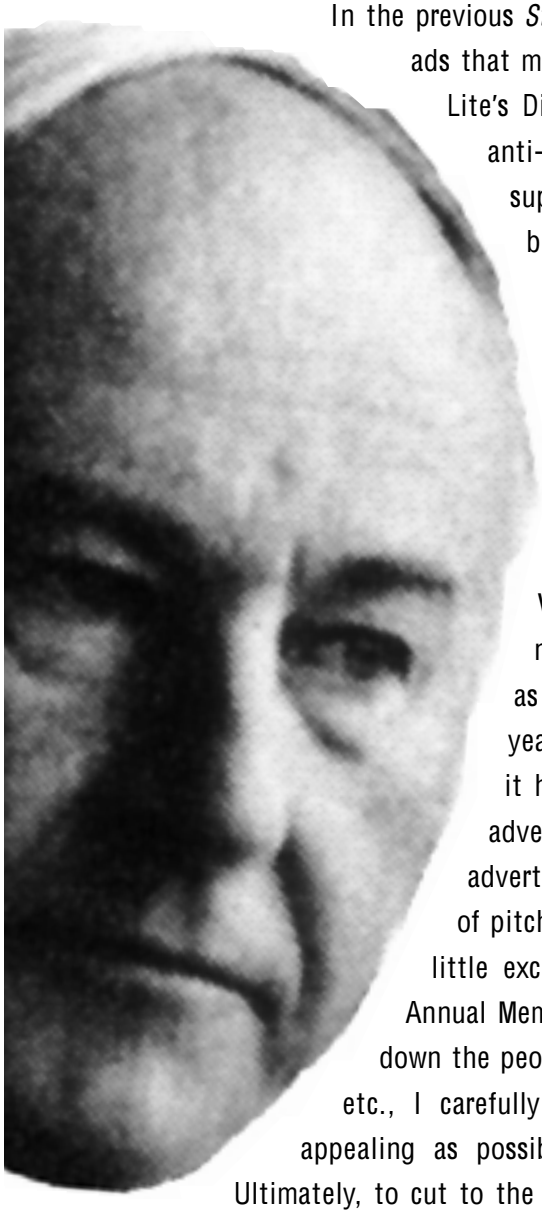
III. EFFECTS OF P53 PROTEINS AND THIER IMPLICATIONS FOR RE-ENGINEERING THE CORPORATION



by David Glenn

ATTN: RETARDS PT. II
THE FIRST ANNUAL

VANCE



In the previous *Stay Free!* (#14), I did a brief history of anti-advertising—ads that make fun of advertising. Sprite's "Image is Nothing," Miller Lite's Dick, and since then: Camel's, Continental Airlines, M&M's anti-millenium ads, they're all over. ★ Since advertisers supposedly hate ads so much, and since selling is such a burden, I thought it would be funny to offer them a chance to create *real* anti-ads? That is, to create the most scathing and pointed attacks on advertising possible—product not included. In other words, to call their bluff, and to publish the results as an article. Unfortunately, editors weren't interested. That left two options: my more or less regular spot in the *Village Voice*—which didn't seem appropriate—or *Stay Free!* ★ Up until around that time, Vance Packard was one of the people I'd read *about* but never read. I bought his classic, *Hidden Persuaders* (1957), as soon as he died and let it sit on my shelf for a couple of years. *Hidden Persuaders* turned out to be great, though. Sure, it had its flaws. But Packard helped popularize a critique of advertising, one which was quickly absorbed with ads about advertising (or what we're loosely calling anti-ads). ★ Instead of pitching this to ad people as a regular old article, it needed a little excitement. So the article became a celebration, the "First Annual Memorial Tribute and Festival of VANCE." After hours hunting down the people responsible for the Dicks, the M&Ms "millenium" hype, etc., I carefully crafted a letter to make the VANCE project sound as appealing as possible. Made a flyer, dug up some prizes, the works! ★ Ultimately, to cut to the chase—surprise—no one responded. Well, ok, one of the Miller beer team called and invited me to smoke crack with him but that was it. He didn't even return my call (though this was probably my fault for being in a coma when I droned into his machine about preferring watery, domestic urine to crack). At any rate, the next time someone tells me the creators of Dick et al. are really trying to subvert The Man, I'll have one word for them: VANCE.

ATTN: RETARDS PT. II
THE FIRST ANNUAL
VANCE

STAY FREE!

Prince St. Station
P.O. Box 306
New York, NY 10012
stayfree@sunsite.unc.edu

Dear _____

Congratulations! For your stellar creative work, you've been selected to CONTRIBUTE TO STAY FREE! MAGAZINE. Ever dream of exploring your deepest, darkest movivations? Rubbing shoulders with an elite group of the nation's premier media critics?

Well, me neither. I would, however, like to offer you the opportunity to showcase your creative skills without any hassle from clients. *Stay Free!* will run your ad free in our next issue as part of our First Annual Memorial Tribute & Festival of VANCE, in honor of celebrated dead author Vance Packard (*The Hidden Persuaders, The Status Seekers*).

The deal: come up with the most subversive, pointed attack on advertising possible. Product not included. The ads may be directed to the public at large or to fellow advertisers (whatever you consider the most affective means for putting yourselves out of business.) The best entries will be published in our fall 1998 issue and sent to key industry publications with a fake letter from Vance.

Here's your chance to remake that great idea you could never quite sell. What's more, top contestants will receive lifetime subscriptions to Adbusters, a special hand-crafted Vance wristwatch (limited edition of 6), and a bubble bath with Bob Garfield*.

Sincerely,

Carrie McLaren
Editor/Publisher

*invited

This letter (left) was sent out to about fifty carefully selected advertising people in May 1998. I also enclosed a flyer with detailed instructions, photos of the grand prize (a limited-edition wristwatch), and several handwritten, asinine comments by Vance.

THIS IS ME. MAYBE YOU RECOGNIZE ME AS THE BESTSELLING DEAD AUTHOR OF THE Hidden PERSUADERS

The prize for submitting anti-ads: a limited-edition VANCE wrist watch. Perfect for any occasion. Can you believe anyone would pass a beauty like this up??

on the job

on the town

with that special someone

leisure time, anytime!

you missed out, people!!!!!

Vance

MADE AND APPROVED BY VANCE
UNLIKE YOU ALL, I CAN SIGN MY NAME!

THE LEFT MEANS FUN!

Members of the Lower East Side Collective (LESC) blow off some steam with an evening line dance. Pictured L to R: Stephen Duncombe, Vickie Larson, Rachel Neumann, Todd Muller, Jenny Raskin.

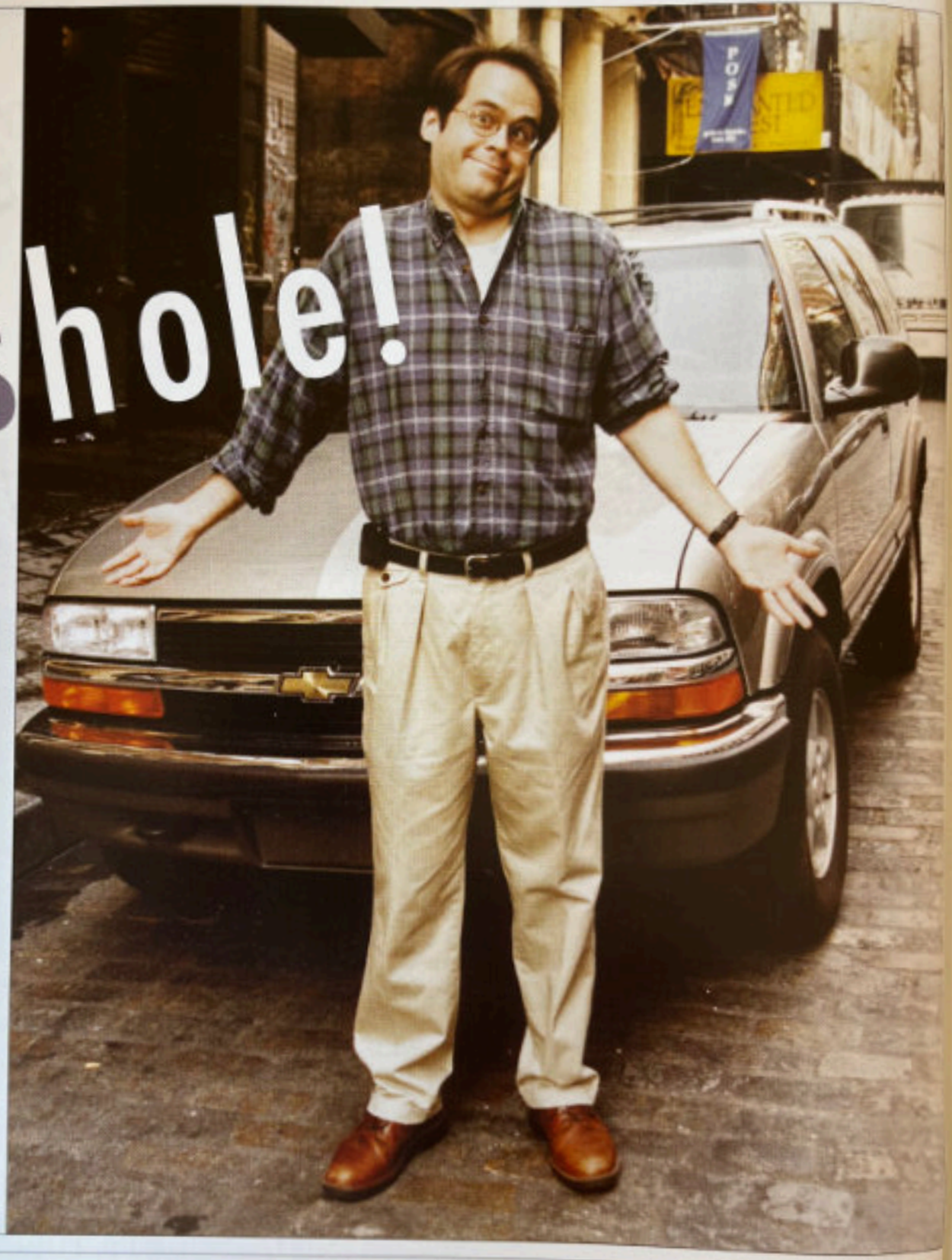
Doug Henwood, editor of *Left Business Observer* and author of *Wall Street*, always wears "protection." Above: Doug reads *Entertainment Weekly* while floating mid-air.

Dissent's David Glenn keeps 'em in stitches crabwalking down Bleeker. Bottom: Fellow democratic socialists Oscar Owens and Tracie McMillan get in on the fun.

Stuart Ewen, author of *PR!* and *Captains of Consciousness*, knows how to have a good time. Stuart, who recently visited Six Flags and watched a rerun of *Road Rules*, will do anything for nitrous oxide.

SEND US YOUR PICTURES FOR THE LEFT MEANS FUN! P.O. BOX 306 PRINCE ST. STATION, NYC 10012. DON'T BE LEFT BEHIND, PEOPLE. WE'RE TAKING OVER AND, DAMMIT, WE'RE FUN!!!

I'm an asshole!



And I've got the vehicle to prove it. A Sport Utility Vehicle. Infrared facial temperature sensors? Got 'em. Roder Retractable Cargo Cover? Got that, too. And 17—count 'em—17 cupholders. The bigger the car, the safer I feel, although you don't want to be in the other car when I roll over, or when my bumper cracks open your head. . . . Oh, and all-wheel drive: never use it, glad it's there. (Wipe your shoes before you step on my rich, pile carpet. Keep the outdoors where it belongs!) ■ My expensive SUV. Clumsy, unsafe, environmentally hazardous, and stupid. Hmmm, I think I like the sound of that . . .

SUV

SCREW ALL OF YOU